The
Hornets
Nest
E·P·ROE

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The Hornet's Nest

A Story of Love and War

By

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THE HORNETS' NEST.

CHAPTER I.

A MIDNIGHT BATTLE.

IT will be remembered that Charlotte is the chief town of the "heady high-minded" and famous county of Mecklenburg, North Carolina, whose people virtually declared their independence of England a year before Congress followed their example and gave us our "glorious Fourth of July." Lord Cornwallis, commander of the British army, on his retreat from this village, halted at a plantation and became the unwelcome guest of Mrs. Robert Wilson, wife of the owner of the estate. His lordship sought by flattering

words to win this patriotic woman to royalistic views.

She replied, "I have seven sons, who are now, or who have been, bearing arms; indeed, my seventh son, Zaccheus, who is only fifteen years old, I yesterday assisted to get ready to go and join his father and brothers in Sumter's army. Now, sooner than see one of my family turn back, I would take these boys (pointing to three small sons) and with them would myself enlist and show my husband and sons how to fight, and, if necessary, to die for their country."

"Ah, ah, general," said the bloody-handed Colonel Tarleton, at his elbow, "I think you've got into a hornets' nest."

Either from this remark, or on account of the unconquerable spirit and fighting qualities of the people, the region, of which the village of Charlotte was the centre, became known during the Revolution as the "Hornets' Nest." Cornwallis always spoke of it under this title. The following story, founded upon historical facts, may serve to show how active

were some of the boys, like young Zach Wilson, in earning the epithet. In 1780 the British army was at Charlotte only nineteen days, but a good deal happened in that brief time.

The scene of my story opens at a plantation which gave evidence of thrift and homely abundance. The house also was, for that early day, roomy and comfortable. The family consisted of Mrs. McIntire, her daughter Ella, a blue-eyed lassie of eighteen, her son Angus, nearly seventeen, and two little girls. They were just finishing their dinner when they were hastily summoned to the veranda by the distant clatter of a horse's hoofs.

"It's Burton Craige," cried Angus, "and I reckon there's trouble from the way he rides."

It was evident that Ella had recognized the horseman also, for her color heightened and her eyes were full of eager interest. Although Burton Craige was but a year older than herself, he was her acknowledged lover and her mother already loved him as a son. The same terrible misfor-

ture had drawn them together and cemented the ties of neighborly friendship. Burton's father and Mrs. McIntire's husband had both been killed in battle by the troops commanded by the relentless Tarleton. Young Craige's mother had been feeble at the time and did not long survive the shock of her husband's death. Burton resided with a maiden aunt who, from temperament, was able to do little toward replacing those whom he had lost. The orphan, therefore, had naturally sought and found sympathy and companionship at the home to which he was now so rapidly approaching. He was a manly young fellow whom outdoor life and sports had developed into fine and vigorous proportions. The heavy down on his upper lip and his dark, full eyes bespoke the early coming of manhood and a fearless spirit.

"What is it?" cried Angus, running forward to meet him. "Is the enemy moving up?"

"Yes," replied the youth, hurriedly. "Cornwallis is on the march and bloody

Tarleton is with him. Graham has summoned volunteers to Charlotte and I'm on my way there, but reckoned I'd stop and see if you wanted to go with me."

"Of course I do. Ho, there, Joe," shouting to a negro at the barn, "saddle my horse, quick. I'll get my rifle and be ready in five minutes!"

"Oh, Angus, what are you going to do?" cried his mother. "Burton, you will not lead my son into danger?"

The youth had now dismounted and thrown the reins of his horse to a slave who had hastened forward. He was greeted as if already one of the family, and answered with a grim sort of laugh, "I reckon Angus is his father's son and won't need much leading." Then he added gravely and almost tenderly, "Mother, dear" (the warm-hearted fellow had already given her this title), "we must look at things as they are. Gus and I are your protectors now, and we can sight a rifle as well as if we were twenty years older. What would our fathers say, could they speak, if we should skulk

now that their murderer is coming? What, indeed, would you and Ella think of us?"

"But what can you two boys do?"

"We can do as much as men; or, if we can't, we can learn. Gus and I can plant a bullet where we want to at pretty long range, and our bullets would do the business for Tarleton and his cut-throats as thoroughly as if fired by a gray-beard. What's more, I can use my sabre and pistols, if much drill has been of any use. We'll promise to be prudent, mother, but we wouldn't deserve our names if we hung back until the British came and drove you and my Ella and the children into the woods. The whole country-side, young and old, will be arming and taking a hand in this game, and you wouldn't have us hang back?"

"No, indeed, mother," cried Ella, although tears dimmed her eyes. "Burton's right. He and Angus are doing as I would do if I were a man. Young as they are, they must act the part of men."

"And you, sweetheart, are acting the

part of a brave little woman. You're the kind for a soldier's wife. Believe me, mother, danger would soon find us if we shunned it, and we take the best chance of escaping by meeting it halfway. To protect you we must drive our enemy back or else make the country too hot for them. Of course we are not going to run, like a pair of fools, right into their clutches. From behind trees, fences and all sorts of cover, we, like our friends farther south, must annoy them with well-aimed shots. All we can do to-day is to ride down to Charlotte to see what the prospects are, and show that we, of all others, are not backward."

Angus had joined them and now stood with his right arm around his mother, while he held his rifle in his left hand. He had her blue eyes, but they were quiet and resolute. His father's death and the responsibility it had imposed had sobered and developed him beyond his years. The mother saw his expression and knew its meaning.

"Yes, boys," she said very sadly. "I

see how it is, and suppose you are taking the right course, but you can't know how a mother's heart shrinks from what may happen. I've suffered too much——" Then kissing them both, she hastily entered the house.

In a few moments they were galloping swiftly away, presenting a fine contrast as they sat their fleet horses with the ease of Southern youth, who are almost brought up in the saddle. They were dressed in blue hunting shirts belted at the waist and fringed around the bottom. Close-fitting knee-breeches of blue homespun jeans, and stockings of like color, set off their lithe shapely limbs, while moccasins that would give them a noiseless tread encased their feet. Their hats were made of raccoon skins, with the tails hanging jauntily towards the left shoulder. Though scarcely more than boys, they could prove formidable foes with their thorough knowledge of the rough, wooded country, and their celerity of movement. Burton was the larger and stronger of the two and inclined to be impetuous;

but Angus had the cool, wary courage of his Scotch ancestry. A sense of the great injury which he and his family had suffered was like a slow steady fire in his veins, but he was not one to incur risks from passionate, hasty action. Burton, on the other hand, although he assumed the leadership naturally his from age, would often need restraining counsel.

They found the little village of Charlotte seething with excitement, and many of the women almost beside themselves with terror. Cornwallis and the ruthless Tarleton were said to be not many miles away, and marching on the place. The two friends soon fell in with their acquaintance, young George Graham, who was one of those natural leaders that are always developed in stormy times. Although scarcely a year the senior of Burton, yet he had already gathered several daring spirits about him. Angus and Burton at once joined this group. George was acting under the orders of his brother, Major Joseph Graham, who had been sent to Charlotte to take command of the vol-

unteers there as soon as it was clear that the British army was marching on the place. This brave officer had enlisted in the regular Continental army when but nineteen, and had already seen much dangerous service. He was now but twenty-one, yet to him looked both young and old for the protection of their town and their homes. All the men of the village capable of bearing arms were under his command, and in the terrible emergency grandsires and grandsons mustered side by side. From the surrounding country motley groups of men and boys, clad in homespun, came riding or trudging in and reporting to the boy-like looking major, who nevertheless was respected not only for his character, but also for the reason that he had often proven himself cool and brave under the enemy's fire. Nothing gave one greater prestige among raw recruits than the reputation of having smelt gunpowder before, and young Joe Graham was looked upon as a regular "fire-eater." He made good his fame within the next twenty-four hours. Indeed,

he inspired confidence in his men at once by carefully looking after their comfort and effectiveness. Not a moment was spent in idle vaporings or confused counsels. His orders were prompt and decisive, and the respite given before the approach of the enemy was employed in seeing that all had ammunition suited to their weapons. But few of these old flint-lock rifles and shot-guns were alike, and unless the powder-horns were full, and the pouches supplied with bullets that would fit the bore of the barrel, they would be but Quaker guns. The majority brought their ammunition, but this at that day was very scarce, and not a few were without any. Some had the single-barrel flint-lock pistols then in vogue, and others nondescript sabres made of saws ground to an edge. But they were in the hands of resolute men, who hoped to obtain better weapons from their slain or captured enemies.

Graham was in frequent communication with Colonel Davie, who, with his force, was skirmishing in front of the

British, and seeking to impede its march. Late in the afternoon George Graham was sent by his brother to Davie to obtain further information, and Burton and Angus volunteered to accompany him. By nightfall they met the vanguard of the small force whose very audacity had doubled their numbers in British estimation. Both the hostile forces halted in the evening to rest and cook supper, and the Whig soldiers, with quick hospitality, shared their coarse, limited rations with the three young men who had joined them. About ten o'clock the moon rose, and scouts came in with tidings that the English army was again in motion. Graham and his followers took places in the rear of the little column led by Davie, who now contented himself with keeping well in advance, that he might carry out a plan that was forming in his mind. His active scouts hovered in front of the enemy, and, while doing nothing to provoke a conflict, kept sufficiently near to note all movements.

Thus the two commands—the little

handful of men with Davie and the British army led by the world-renowned nobleman and general, Cornwallis—moved steadily forward through the night over the hilly country-road. Sometimes the moon's rays glinted faintly on rifle-barrels, bayonets and scabbards, but more often men and horses marched in dim outline beneath the shadowy forest.

When it became evident that the enemy proposed to enter the town that night, George Graham and his two friends were directed to ride forward rapidly and report the fact to Major Graham. There had been no sleep in Charlotte, and when the small Whig force under Davie arrived at midnight, it received a warm welcome. The tidings brought kindled the flames of excitement seven times hotter. The British army, the terrible Tarleton, was but a mile away and coming directly on. Some besought Davie's protection and then regretted their request, for his effort to comply would bring on a battle about their very doors. But the policy of the

resolute partisan officers was not to be influenced by the conflicting views of the villagers, who, like so many other residents in war-trampled regions, must take their chances like the soldiers. The majority of the men, and indeed of the women of Charlotte, were eager that at least one blow should be struck before their hearths were desecrated. We can have little idea of the depth of feeling which then existed. Cornwallis had ordered the hanging of many patriots whom the people of this region knew well. Tarleton's troopers had not only fought the Whig soldiery with fiery courage, but also had savagely butchered them after they had surrendered. And now at the dread hour of midnight these cruel officers and their red-handed men were approaching defenceless homes. Little wonder that there was either almost mortal terror or desperate courage on every side, according to the temper of those who faced the awful emergency.

Colonel Davie's quick eye soon took in the chances for defence. The forty

odd houses were built on streets that intersected each other at right angles. In front of the court-house was a stone wall breast-high. Dismounting his cavalry he placed them behind this partial cover. Farther on down the street by which the British would enter, and lining it on either side, were fences and garden-shrubbery. Behind these obstructions he placed his infantry and the men of the region who had volunteered under the leadership of Major Graham.

Now that a battle seemed inevitable, there was no thought of flinching on the part of our two friends, Burton and Angus. They, with others, rode rapidly to the eastern side of the village and tied their horses, leaving them in charge of Zach Wilson, since he was the youngest of the party. Then they hastened back and took position under the orders of Graham behind a garden fence nearest to the advance of the enemy.

"I hate this skulking," said Burton, whose eyes glowed like coals in the moonlight. "If I were only on my good

horse it would be glorious to ride straight at 'em with a sharp sabre."

"Nonsense!" said Angus, quietly, "you know it would be ridiculous instead of glorious. What could you or all of us do, riding straight at the whole British army?"

"Oh, I know Graham and Davie are right," replied Burton, with his grim laugh, "I was only saying how I'd like to do things. Some day, before the scrimmage is over, I hope to have a chance for a charge in an open field. Then one would feel like a soldier instead of a skulking hunter."

"Father used to say that those were the best soldiers who best obeyed orders and carried out their officers' plans. I'm content to be where I am, and I feel as if I could almost die for the chance to draw my bead on Tarleton. Oh! see; there they are. They are forming on the common. Let us hold our fire 'till we are sure of our man."

The boy was quite as deeply stirred as his older comrade, but in his case excite-

ment tended to steady his nerves and banish the thought of fear.

By this time every house was closed and doors and windows barred. Within were trembling women and children, some weeping, some praying for fathers, husbands, brothers, and lovers. Without, the moonlight revealed the dusky, motionless forms of men, their white, stern faces and gleaming rifle barrels.

After a brief halt upon the common, spent by the British in reconnoitring the position of their enemy, the stillness was broken by the clangor of a trumpet sounding a charge. With skirmish line in front, the English infantry moved forward promptly on the flanks, while Tarleton's cavalry followed slowly in the centre.

The two friends saw them coming and knew that they two would be among the first engaged.

"Heavens! how white you are, Angus." Burton whispered.

The boy gave a quick gasp, his mouth twitched for a moment, and then

he faltered, "Burton, I never fired at a man before. No matter how right and just it is, it seems an awful thing to take aim at a man."

"Drive away such thoughts, Gus. They'll soon take aim at you and they killed your father."

"Ah! yes, they killed my father," and the delicate mouth became firm, the face that was almost girlish in the moonlight stern and quiet with its purpose.

The warm-hearted Burton put his arm about the boy's neck in the shadow of a bush and kissed him. "Give that to Ella if any thing happens to me," he said. "How strangely you look like her at this moment! Ha! the ball's begun."

There was a flash from a musket on the skirmish line and a bullet whizzed by. Then many other reports followed, the British infantry closed up and sought to dislodge Graham and his party from their cover.

Burton, Angus, and George Graham were on the left side of the street. The young major commanding often appeared

with an encouraging word. Indeed, he was so active that he seemed gifted with the power of being in many places at once, and his acquaintance with the men enabled him to address them by name and to say words of cheer and confidence which steadied the aim of many a poor fellow now for the first time under fire. Our young friends did not belong to the ordinary raw militia class, but were finely nurtured youths and inspired by motives of the strongest character. The "sing" of the first bullet stung Angus like a cut from a whip. In an instant he took aim at a dark form on the enemy's line whence a flash had proceeded, and fired; then saw, with a strange thrill, that there was a gap in that line. For the next few moments he, Burton and all about them were loading and firing as rapidly as possible. But the British infantry came steadily forward on both flanks, creeping along the sides of the street, breaking through and leaping over garden fences and other obstructions; while moving slowly up through the centre of the street

advanced a solid body of cavalry. Again a trumpet resounded above the crash of musketry, and, as if each horse had felt the touch of a spur, they all sprung into a gallop. Their riders, with sabres flashing in the pale light, and yells that, to the poor women in the houses, sounded like the cries of demons, dashed by. All knew that Tarleton's ruthless cavalry was charging, led, as it was then believed, by Tarleton himself.

Burton and Angus, all unaccustomed to the sights and sounds of battle, fairly held their breath as the English troopers thundered by but a few feet away. The very ground appeared to tremble, and it seemed to them that nothing could resist the headlong onset. Indeed, it was almost a moment of panic, for the young volunteers saw that their comrades on the opposite side of the street were giving way rapidly, pursued by the British flanking infantry.

But Major Graham's voice rang out above the din, "Steady, boys. Don't mind the cavalry; Davie will take care of

them. Look to the flankers here on your left. They're your game. Aim as if you were shooting squirrels out of tree-tops," and snatching a rifle from a trembling fellow he stepped out in advance of his men and dropped a leading British soldier.

But the report of his weapon was drowned by a roar of musketry at the court-house, about eighty yards up the street. The long stone wall behind which Colonel Davie had posted his men seemed lined with fire. The headlong charge of the British troopers was checked; the van crumbled away; a moment later they came galloping wildly back, confused, astounded, shattered.

"Hurrah!" shouted Burton, and he emptied a saddle of one flying form. His cry of exultation was taken up and resounded up and down the line; meanwhile the volunteers continued loading and firing with feverish eagerness.

Angus had reserved his fire until the last moment as the cavalry retreated. His hope was to single out a man whose orders and air of authority might indicate

the hated Tarleton, for the boy did not know then that Tarleton was ill and that Major Hanger was in command. At last, in the rear he saw an officer who was endeavoring to check the flight of the troopers. Angus covered him and fired; a horse rushed away riderless and the panic near was redoubled.

The British flanking infantry, with the steadiness of veterans, continued to advance, paying no attention to the fortunes of their cavalry. Graham's right, on the opposite side of the street, had been driven well back, and his left was in peril of being surrounded. Davie saw the danger, and sent orders that all the volunteers should fall back and form lines on both flanks with him at the court-house. This change was soon effected, the men firing as they retreated.

Stung by their repulse, and inspired by the success of the infantry on their flanks, the British cavalry were again led in a furious charge by Major Hanger. Angus was now on the right of the line near the court-house fence, and some-

what in advance. He, with Burton, was in a little garden enclosure embowered in shrubbery; and the two youths no longer felt the half-paralyzing awe which for a moment had impressed them at the first charge. Indeed, the younger boy was peering through a bush with the eye of an eagle that he might detect the man whom he regarded as the slayer of his father. As the troop thundered nearer, his attention was caught by a dragoon on the right, who was waving his sabre and looking back toward the rushing force. Even to the boy's inexperienced eyes this man seemed the leader, and he covered him with his rifle, but waited until greater nearness gave accuracy to his aim. Then he fired, and saw this man reel in his saddle. The next instant out leaped again the line of fire along the court-house fence, and the front lines of the charging cavalry crumbled and melted away as if smitten by a blast from a furnace. Those in the rear still pressed forward for a moment, but a second rank behind the fence poured in

another volley, and from rifles like those of Burton and Angus on the flanks scattering but deadly shots were fired. Tarleton's veteran cavalry again fled, followed by a partly exultant and partly jeering shout from the Whig soldiery.

The horse of a trooper who had been wounded became unmanageable, and galloped towards our friends. When but a short distance away the rider fell off and lay helpless in the street, his sabre dropping from his nerveless grasp. Lightly as a deer Burton bounded over the fence, unbuckled the belt and scabbard from the prostrate form, and, seizing the sabre, rushed back, regaining shelter at the side of Angus in safety, although grazed by more than one bullet from the British infantry.

"That was rash, Burton," said Angus, reproachfully.

"Shut up, brother Gus, and stand still while I buckle on this sabre," was the laughing reply. "Now, we've only to capture a pair of pistols, and you are as well armed as I am."

CHAPTER II.

AN HEROIC DEED.

THE British infantry were not at all discouraged by the second repulse of the cavalry. Indeed, it was known by all parties that the conflict was an utterly unequal one, and must eventually end in the retreat of the small Whig force before the British army. It was a matter of enraged surprise on one side and wondering exultation on the other that the conflict had been maintained so long and with such unexpected results. The English infantry determined to decide the battle, which was so humiliating to them, and made another forward rush on Graham's men on the right. These again gave way after fighting bravely; and Davie, at the court-house, found that he was being flanked: a condition of affairs which a good soldier never permits if he

can help it. Therefore, above the rattle of musketry, was heard a shrill bugle sounding "retreat."

But retreat did not mean flight. It was only a hasty rush of all the dismounted men for their horses, while those who had no mount followed more slowly, keeping the enemy in check. Burton, Angus and George Graham found both their horses and young Zach Wilson equally impatient. The latter had been chafing at the inactive duty assigned to him, but had been faithful to this duty in spite of the exciting and terrible sounds of battle. He was speedily delighted to find that Davie and Graham were preparing for another conflict rather than for a hasty retirement. A line was formed on high ground in partial shelter east of the village. The dismounted Whigs were allowed to pass through and seek cover in the forest beyond, from which they made their way to their homes, or to some place of shelter and concealment. Their comrades, now that they were in the saddle, felt redoubled confidence in awaiting an-

other attack from the enemy. It soon came. Cornwallis himself rode up to his twice-defeated cavalry, and while he chided them, he also inspired by reminding them of the reputation won on other fields. Again they advanced to the charge, but in this instance kept abreast of the still advancing infantry. Davie's and Graham's men coolly sat still on their horses until the command "Fire!" ran down the line. Again the bullets sped like a scorching, withering flame, and the whole British line was thrown into a confusion, which might have easily been developed into a rout were it not for the heavy supports which were now coming up.

Colonel Davie's experienced eye saw that the time for final retreat had now come. Before the enemy could rally from the stunning effects of this third repulse, he drew off his men and retired rapidly by the great Salisbury Road. Major Graham, whose small force was made up chiefly from the neighborhood, was ordered to cover this retreat as far as

possible, and so began a running fight which, with occasional respites, did not end until the next day.

George Graham acted as his brother's aid, and Burton and Angus aimed to keep as near the major as they could during the next eventful hours. The gallant young officer had won their unbounded admiration, and they felt that under his immediate eyes and direction they could do the most effective service, while at the same time learning a soldier's duty from a master. Little was left for them during the remainder of the night beyond the tactics of the Indians. They knew the by-paths, the cross-roads, the positions of natural strength, where one man was worth a dozen in the hilly, wooded region through which passed the main highway. Skirting this, they kept in deep shadows, and from behind tree, bush, and rock, their rifles flashed out. If the enemy made a rush toward the spot, they were not there. Like swift shadows, they had sped on through the dusky forest, found time to load again, and choose some other cover

with a path of retreat leading from it. Then as the stubborn enemy approached, they would blaze away and be off. Thus their British pursuers were harassed in front and on both flanks, and their march was impeded. Their cavalry made dashes here and there, only to be entangled in what seemed an empty wilderness. Finally, there appeared to be no other resource than for the infantry to advance as rapidly as possible, with flankers in the woods on each side of the road, and so to drive the stinging, wasp-like partisans before them. This from superiority in numbers they could easily do, but only at a constant loss and annoyance.

They had skirmished up a long hill to its very brow, and then Major Graham ordered his bugler to sound swift retreat. George, with a small detachment, in which were our friends, was posted here, with orders to wait the near approach of the enemy, to give them a volley, then to strike directly into the woods and let his men make their way singly or by twos and threes to the brow of the next hill.

The major, having given his instructions, galloped away after the rest of his force.

Angus and Burton determined to keep together, and, after delivering their fire, to escape by an obscure path which they had discovered leading to the right from the highway.

The British, hearing the bugle recall, and respited from the dropping, galling fire which had thus far attacked their advance, came on rapidly. George Graham held his dogs of war in leash too long perhaps. They gave their volley and it was effective, and at the same time it revealed but a small and concentrated force. So far from checking the deeply incensed enemy, they came on with a rush, in the hope of at last striking those who had so long punished them. The Whig partisans scattered, but pursuers were on their heels. Angus led the way through the path that had been decided upon, and Burton and George Graham followed. Although they tried to spur forward at reckless speed, the roughness and obscur-

ity of the path enabled vindictive enemies to gain upon them.

"Dismount, turn the horses loose and switch them with a gad. We must take to the bush on foot," said George rapidly, setting the example by his own action. The horses plunged forward down the side of the hill; the three friends had scarcely time to creep into a thicket before half a dozen British soldiers went running and stumbling by. Then one of them caught a glimpse of a horse and fired. A neigh of pain showed that the poor animal was hit, and the pursuit was pressed more hotly.

A moment later George whispered, "Creep, crawl, snake away. Now's our chance. There'll be more here soon."

His words were true enough. The shot brought a dozen more down the path, but the young partisans had been hunters before they became soldiers, and now they crept away almost from under the feet of their enemies, who, intent upon the pursuit of riderless horses, passed noisily by. At last the boys ventured to

stand erect and dodge from tree to tree and bush. to bush until they felt sufficiently secure to stop and reload their rifles.

"We're in a nice scrape now," said Burton. "I feel a good deal like a landed fish without my horse."

"We were in a worse scrape a few minutes ago," replied George, coolly. "We can't do any good by taking risks here any longer. The major says, 'A man's a fool who takes useless risks.' Our course is to work far enough to the right to make sure we are beyond those fellows after our horses and see if there's any chance of our catching 'em again. If there isn't, we must not lose a minute in reaching yonder hill-top, where the major's going to set an ambush."

"George is right," said Angus. "If we are cut off from the main body there won't be much chance for us after daylight without our horses. Tired as we already are, the enemy would soon run us down if they caught sight of us."

In obedience to this view they had struck out stealthily and rapidly on the

right of those that had followed them. It had been discovered that the horses were riderless, and the pursuers were spreading out fan-fashion and beating the woods in the hope of capturing the dismounted men.

"We'd have been nabbed if we had stayed in that thicket," George whispered. "How I'd like to give the villains another shot! It would do us more harm than it would them, so let's push on."

This they did a few moments longer, leaving, as they supposed, their enemies behind them. Suddenly Burton, who was now in advance, whispered, "Hush! "Down behind this rock."

Three of the British soldiers had been lured on by the tired horses and had eventually caught them. They were now leading them almost directly towards their actual masters.

"I take command," whispered George. "You two follow me," and he crept a little nearer the course of the approaching foes.

"Well," said the foremost man, "this

be better luck than capturin' the blasted rebels. When we get hout of this 'anged woods we'll be 'oss sogers for the whiles."

"Surrender! Speak or move and you're dead," threatened George, and the startled Englishman found a rifle muzzle between his eyes.

Burton and Angus had followed George's example, and all three of the enemy stood speechless and paralyzed. George resumed in the same penetrating whisper, "If you want to save your lives, all three do as I order. First drop your muskets." They obey.

"Now hold up your hands and range yourselves close facing me. Angus, you take the horses." The prisoners complying, George continued, "Burton, you search them for concealed weapons and any thing useful to us. I, meanwhile, will cover them with my rifle and shoot the first man that moves." Burton was expeditious, and then George gave his final order, "Angus, mount and lead as rapidly as possible. The prisoners will follow at your horse's heels, and I will

tread upon theirs, pistol in hand. Mark you, fellows, if you try to get away or to attract your friends, you get a bullet instantly. Burton, you bring up the rear with the spoils, which you can drop if we have to fight. Forward, march!"

As rapidly as the broken, wooded region permitted, they made their way to the brow of the next hill, keeping a wide interval between themselves and the high-road. As they approached the hill-top there was a loud crash of musketry, which can readily be explained. Major Graham knew of the natural facilities afforded by the place for an ambuscade, also of a wood-road near, which led to a distant plantation. He had resolved to make a sharp fight at this spot, and then gallop away to the farm, which was owned by a friend to the cause, and there give his men and horses food and a little rest. The British, after their last punishment, had followed slowly and warily, fearing a like experience again. When they had marched almost a mile without being molested, they had about concluded that

their enemies had retired finally, in order to reach some place of concealment before daylight, which now was near. It was argued that the small squad which had fired upon them last had been left to check their advance and give the rest of the partisans time to get away ; therefore, the British officers began to lead their men more rapidly and carelessly, hoping before long that they could capture a breakfast, if not their enemies. The road near the brow of the hill passed through a narrow little ravine with steep wooded banks which gave the flankers scarcely any footing. As the place looked suspicious, the English officer in command ordered a few of the cavalry to go forward and reconnoitre. They rode through to the very brow of the hill, returned and reported the place deserted. So it was, with the exception of three or four scouts lying prone on the ground along the right of the ravine, within easy rifle range of the road. When the British moved forward and were under their guns the scouts gave low whistles. A

line of men some distance in the rear, rose, moved forward and fired a volley into the crowded road. Yells, groans, orders, futile shots were the reply, but the immediate and temporary result was that the British column fell back in confusion. Graham and his followers in the meantime darted off under the cover of the smoke of their rifles to the spot where their horses were held by men detailed for the purpose, and were about to gallop away, when George, Burton, and Angus brought in their three prisoners on the run. The cheers with which they were greeted were speedily checked. The boyish-looking major merely shook his brother's hand, nodded and smiled at his companions, then ordered, "Mount the prisoners behind three of our men. Forward, march!" and away he went down the wood-road at a gallop. In an hour they reached the plantation; a sentence explained their need to the owner; the horses were instantly unbitted, fed and rubbed down. A beef was killed, skinned, quartered, cut up, and

placed over fires with a celerity of which no one but a cavalryman can have any idea. Fragrance from many coffee pots was soon upon the breeze also, while, at the house, all the appliances of the kitchen were taxed to provide for the officers. The men jested and laughed as they flew about in their preparations, for they were exultant over the events of the night. Day, however, was breaking broadly, and all knew that their respite might be brief indeed. So it proved.

As they had approached the plantation the major had said to his brother and his companions, "I shall give you a soldier's reward for your good behavior. Conceal yourselves on this road, fire a shot if the enemy approaches, and gallop in. I will send you some breakfast as soon as it is ready. I entrust myself and men to your vigilance."

Again Burton laughed grimly when they were left alone, and said, "A great honor, surely, but it doesn't fill an empty stomach. How do you like soldiering, Gus?"

"It's not a question of like or dislike. I reckon, though, that I never felt so tired and hungry before. I fear mother'll be half beside herself about us."

"I foresee," continued Burton, "that our friends will have to get used to all sorts of irregularity in our coming and going. What we'll do and where we'll be will depend more on the enemy than upon ourselves."

"One thing is already certain," added George, "we shall have to sleep as often in the woods as in our beds. You two stay here and I'll go a hundred yards down the road nearer the enemy. My horse is in the best condition, while yours, Angus, has bled so much that you must try to pick up another beast as soon as you can. Ride him up and down before me a bit."

Angus did so, and with every step the blood oozed from a wound in one of the poor animal's haunches. George wrote a few lines in a little note-book, tore out the sheet, and said, "Take that to my brother."

"But, George," protested the boy, "the major told me—"

"Obey orders," said George, sternly. "You are under my command now. The line I've written will make every thing right. Report to my brother as soon as possible."

Angus yielded reluctantly. When he had gone, Burton asked, "What did you write?"

"I told Joe that Gus's horse was wounded, and that if the enemy came with a rush, as they probably will, we might lose one of the finest and most promising young fellows in the country. He's younger than either of us, but we shall have to look to ourselves or he'll make the best soldier. Screen yourself behind this low pine and be all eyes and ears. I'll go back on the road as I said," and they separated.

For nearly half an hour all remained quiet, and then a man came galloping down the road from the plantation with a pot of coffee and some hoe-cake. Never was meagre breakfast more welcome than

this slight repast to the young videttes, who nevertheless did not relax their vigilance. Again they were left alone, and for a time nothing disturbed the morning quiet along the road except the barking of squirrels in the hickories. Then the sharp report of George's rifle awoke the echoes far and near. A second later he came galloping toward Burton, sheered in behind the pine, and said, "Ride to the major and say the enemy's coming, that I've seen only infantry so far, and that I'm going to strike into the woods and reconnoitre further before I come in."

Burton obeyed instantly, and was rejoiced to see that the partisan troop was already saddling up as he approached. Major Graham heard the report thoughtfully and turned his eyes on his refreshed and inspirited men, who, without waiting for the bugle-call, were trotting sharply forward to the open space in front of the house. Turning to two or three of his officers, he said, "George has seen only infantry. If they have no cavalry with them, I'd like to give 'em another brush.

We could ride away from them when pressed."

"Let us sting 'em a little, any way," cried Colonel Frank Locke, who, waiving his rank and the reputation won in a former battle, was now a zealous volunteer under Graham.

A low bugle-call hastened the fast assembling troopers, and another distant shot was heard from the woods in the direction of the enemy. Soon after a horseman appeared and rode rapidly across the fields.

"It's George," said the major, riding forward to meet him. The brothers conferred a few moments, and then the major, returning to his men, gave a few rapid orders, and the whole troop trotted off towards a valley, which could be followed back into the woods again.

Angus had been kindly received, and the owner of the plantation, at the suggestion of the major, had furnished another horse, telling the boy that he could pay when he could, if ever, adding, "If you don't take him, the British will."

Therefore the lad was enabled to rejoin his friends, and, with George and Burton, rode near the major.

"Why haven't the Britishers come on faster, George?" Burton asked.

"I played a trick on 'em. When I left you and struck into the wood, I let the enemy's advance pass by me for some distance, and then fired a shot into their flank. That brought them to a halt instantly. I've no doubt they thought the woods were full of us, and so they soon will be."

The command had now followed up the ravine so far as to approach the forest. "George," said the major, "pick out a dozen active fellows, scout ahead of us and locate the enemy's position. Meanwhile, I'll move to the left along the edge of the woods towards the road."

George delighted in such dangerous and exciting service, and Burton and Angus were among the first that he selected to accompany him. Hastening forward with his little band, he directed that two should keep together, and that they

should then spread out so as to cover a wide area and yet keep within hailing distance of each other. Thus, in their advance, they were like feelers for the main body, protecting it against surprise. The eyes of every scout was another pair of eyes to the major, for all that was seen would be reported to him. Since Angus was now mounted on a fresh horse, George kept the boy near him, to be employed as a trusty messenger to his brother. He had given to his men a few signals: One whistle signified to continue advancing; two whistles to halt; three for one man to dismount and advance stealthily on foot while his comrade held his horse; four ordered a retreat, and one long whistle meant fire.

Away they went through the woods, covering the van and right flank of Major Graham's advance. They had not gone very far before two whistles brought every horse and rider to a halt.

"Hold my horse, Gus," said George, leaping down. "I've caught a glimpse of a red coat," and he darted forward from

tree to tree with the swift yet cautious movement of an Indian. He soon perceived that numbers of the enemy were apparently returning from an unsuccessful beating of the woods, and, believing that with the clue he had obtained, his eyes would be worth more than a dozen, he left his men standing where his last order detained them, and continued to creep toward his foes, who were rejoining the main body in the road. And so he disappeared from the vision of Angus, who, nevertheless, was straining his eyes on the spot where his young leader was last seen, and concentrating all his faculties to catch some indication of his return. Before many moments passed the boy was taught the lesson that, in such warfare, a soldier's watchfulness can be too concentrated. A voice said, almost in his ear, "Surrender, and keep silent." Turning with a violent start he saw a young British ensign leveling a pistol at him, while a burly red-coated infantryman threatened him with his bayonet.

In the confused, awful moment that

followed but one thing was clear—he must warn George and the others at every cost to himself. He gasped the word "mother," tumbled off his horse, away from the bayonet point, and gave four shrill whistles, which meant "retreat."

CHAPTER III.

HEADLONG FLIGHT.

THE course of Angus was unexpected and significant, his signals revealing to the British officer that others were near. "Don't fire," he exclaimed to the soldier with him. "Disarm the boy, bayonet him if he resists, then mount and follow."

The infantryman, as we learned in a previous chapter, had advanced the point of his weapon to the throat of Angus, who had thrown himself off his horse to escape the thrust, and so gain time to give the four whistles which would bring George back and put him on his guard. Before the boy could gather himself up from his fall, the soldier was again almost upon him with his gleaming bayonet, intending first to kill and then disarm him. Spurred by the powerful instinct to shun death, Angus darted under the horse's

body, seizing in his half-conscious, desperate effort for self-preservation the legs of the officer, who was preparing to mount, and jerking with such violence as to throw their owner upon his back. Bouncing upon him like a young panther, the boy drew the officer's pistol from his belt, then turned and fired almost into the face of the pursuing soldier. The man dropped dead across the body of the struggling officer and bore him to the earth again. Panting and actually crying from excitement and horror at the tragedy, Angus nevertheless through all the terrible ordeal held fast to the principle of duty. Snatching up the soldier's musket, he shouted to the officer: "Lie still, or I'll pin you to the ground;" then sent out an agonizing cry: "George! Burton!"

All had taken place in far briefer time than has been required in relating the events. The shot had brought Burton galloping back. He had been on the right of the scouting line and not very far off. In obedience to the signal he had retreated slowly and reluctantly, but

after the report of the pistol fired by Angus, he had no other thought than that of reaching his leader and the boy he loved. George had been startled and perplexed at the four whistles given by other lips than his own. Believing that there must be good reason for them, he began to retrace his steps cautiously, for he had crept very near to the enemy. The shot, however, which came an instant later, gave wings to his feet, and he and Burton met at almost the same moment.

They were too much astonished for a moment to speak, as they witnessed the scene before them—the horses gone, a British officer on his back with a dead soldier lying across him, and Angus sobbing, yet ready to use the bayonet should there be need.

"What on earth does all this mean, Gus?" cried George.

'Take the musket—quick, I'm sick," was the boy's reply.

Burton caught him as he almost fainted in the violent reaction which followed a

sense of security and the presence of those for whom he had virtually offered his life.

"Gus, dear Gus, are you wounded?" Burton asked in tones of deep distress, supporting the lad to a fallen tree.

"I don't know," gasped the boy; "reckon not; I ain't used to such things."

Others of the scouting force now came galloping forward, and George shouted, "Two catch our horses and the rest cover our retreat. You, Zach Wilson, stay and help us." He then tossed the dead soldier to one side and said to the officer: "Rise, if you can. You are a prisoner."

"I suppose I must yield," said the ensign, with a crimson face, "but I'd rather you would shoot and leave me here. To be captured as I've been——"

"No matter, you are captured. Ha! there come your friends, who may soon turn the tables. Forward here. Each take a tree and drop the first red-coat that shows himself. Retire obliquely to

the left on the main body. Zach, take the prisoner on a run to the major, who'll have some questions to ask him. Mount, Burton, I'll put Gus up behind you. Go with Zach and the prisoner and report. Take the ensign's sword and pistols with you; they belong to Gus. No time now for explanations. Ah! there comes my horse. There's nothing for us now but to retire skirmishing."

The British infantry advanced rapidly, believing that they had at last found the enemy whom they had been seeking. In the dead soldier they recognized one of their scouts sent out to beat the woods, and the capture of the officer was readily surmised.

Speedily satisfied that an overwhelming force was approaching, George gave in his turn four whistles, and with all his men retreated rapidly to the main body.

Angus's horse had been intercepted, so the boy, now mounted again and deeply mortified at his emotion and faintness, began telling the major what had happened, in a shame-faced way. The

captured officer, still more embarrassed, stood near, while several smiling veterans looked on and listened. Poor Angus hoped for nothing better than a few reassuring words to the effect that he would eventually get over his qualms and obtain steadier nerves, when to his unbounded surprise Graham took him by the hand and said warmly :

"I congratulate you, sir. You are but a boy in years, but no man ever did a braver thing than you did in giving those signals. You have probably saved my brother's life, and have certainly rendered us all a great service. If George had been captured, we might have been surprised. I promote you on the spot to the rank of the officer you captured, and guarantee that the governor will confirm my action. Act as my aid for the present. Ha! George, what's your report?"

"The enemy are coming through the woods, first a heavy skirmish line, and then a force that we can't cope with."

"We'll give them a volley before we retire. Judging by young McIntire here

each one of us is good for two. Gentlemen," to his officers, "lead your men forward into the woods a short distance; keep them in order as far as possible. Fire deliberately, and retire rapidly when the bugle sounds retreat."

These orders were carried out, but the British, so far from being checked, rushed forward savagely, and Graham saw that, with his inadequate force, it was time he retired to some place of safety, for both his men and horses would soon be in sore need of more extended rest and refreshment. Accordingly, he led his men rapidly towards the road, passing for several miles over high ground which would give views of the surrounding country.

Angus rejoiced in the fact that every step taken brought him nearer home; and it must be admitted that by this time he was homesick indeed. He knew that his mother would hear exaggerated accounts of the fight at Charlotte the night before, and that her anxiety would be beyond description. While the major's

words and his promotion had heartened him not a little, he was almost mortally weary and painfully oppressed by the scenes he had passed through. His nerves were becoming unstrung and himself a prey to morbid fancies, which are often hard to combat in times of great physical depression. War was far more terrible than he had ever imagined it to be. He had not dreamt of passing through such experiences when he had ridden away in the sunny noon of the previous day. Expecting merely to gather the news, possibly to fire a few shots at long range from behind good cover, he had, on the contrary, found himself drawn into a whirlpool of strife and compelled to face emergencies calculated to shake the nerves of a veteran. He could not get over the terrible awe inspired by the fact that he had faced death himself, and, what was worse, that he had inflicted death.

Burton was older and took things more lightly than Angus. Perhaps, also, he was not capable of receiving such deep

impressions as his young comrade, and, moreover, his experience had not been so tragic. He generously exaggerated all the major's praise, and even made the boy laugh, as they pursued their march, by a comical picture of the scene. "Tell you what 'tis, Gus, when you upset that British officer, you stuck a taller feather in your cap than any of the rest of us young fellows will ever obtain. How Ella will crow over you and your trophies! You have a pair of pistols that any one might be proud of, and the ensign's sword is much more suited to your hand than the big sabre I picked up for you last night."

"There'll be too much cooing when you two meet to leave time for crowing," said the boy. "I own up that the cavalry sabre that you captured for me is too heavy for my use yet; but I shall never forget the risk you took in getting it for me. I say, Burton, please don't tell 'em home how I cried like a baby and came near fainting. I shall tell the major that I'll try to act as his aid if he wants me to after I've seen 'em all at home; but I

won't be an officer, or take command of men. Confound it! something might happen that would make me blubber before them all. Only a man's fit to command men."

"Don't you fret about being a man. Your gristle will harden mighty fast the next few weeks."

"Ah, Burton, I don't feel sure of seeing the next few hours. See, there's a troop of cavalry following us!"

"Come, brother Gus, you're tired to death, and, therefore, blue. All the rest of us know that any one so plucky and lucky is bound to live through every thing and make a name. The ensign you captured said that Major Hanger, who commanded the cavalry, was wounded, and I believe it was your shot that knocked him over;" and so he strove to cheer and rally the boy into his usual courage and hopefulness.

The pursuing force of the enemy's cavalry being small, Graham was induced by his officers to form his men in line on the brow of a hill and await an attack. The

action was rather contrary to his judgment, for he believed that other and larger bodies of troops must be in the vicinity. The foe, perceiving his defensive attitude, approached so slowly and warily, and began firing at such long range, that he was soon led to suspect that their attack was only a feint to detain him, and he expressed his fears to his officers, but they, for a time, overruled his desire to continue the retreat.

At last, but all too late, he resumed his march. As his little force approached a cross-road, they saw a large body of English troops riding rapidly forward to intercept them. Sharp and shrill the bugle sounded, Forward, gallop! and away they went, receiving shots in the flank and rear as they passed the fatal point.

It now became a question of speed and endurance on the part of the horses, for the pursuing force so far outnumbered the partisans as to render resistance hopeless. Unfortunately, the vicinity was open and the road bordered by high

stone walls, therefore there was no chance to distract the enemy by dispersing and seeking concealment.

The intrepid Graham reined in his horse and took his place at the rear of the flying column, seeking, as was his custom, the point nearest the enemy. His brother George, Burton, and Angus followed his example and kept near his side. The face of the young major was pale and stern, showing that this headlong flight was galling in the extreme. His hand was often on his sabre hilt, as if it were hard for him to resist the impulse to turn upon the enemy. Tears were again in Angus's eyes; and he believed he must die, for he saw that the British troopers were gaining upon them. With dogged resolution, however, he kept his eyes on the major, that he might obey the least sign. Again the supreme thought of duty, and his purpose to do it, no matter how greatly he shrunk, and trembled, stood him in good stead, keeping him at the post of honor and danger. Burton was in a rage, his hot blood chafing at the

necessity of flight. His eyes, however, were often and wistfully turned upon Ella's brother. To cool George Graham the affair was taking on the aspect of a problem. His gray eyes from time to time measured the distance that intervened between them and their pursuers, and then searched the road in advance for a piece of woods in which they could scatter, but only flying forms were seen obscurely through clouds of dust.

Nearer and nearer thundered the British troopers, their hoarse shouts and yells becoming every moment more distinct.

"Joe, they are gaining on us," said George, quietly.

"I know it. I wouldn't mind it for myself so much, but I can't endure to see my men cut up. Save yourself any way you can. Ah! they are beginning to fire on us."

"I say, Joe, Gus McIntire has a fresher horse than any of us. Send him forward with orders for each man to save himself as best he can. It will give the boy a chance."

"Glad you reminded me. Ensign McIntire, ride swiftly up the line and say, in passing, each man for himself."

The boy spurred forward, shouting the order in his terror, his fine fleet horse carrying him eventually to the head of the line. Hemmed in by fences as they were, nothing yet was left for the hard pressed partisans but to continue straight on.

The horses of the pursuers were in a fresher and better condition than those of the pursued, and now, after a keen run of nearly two miles, the enemy gained rapidly. Bullets began to fly in increasing numbers among the partisans, and now and then a poor fellow went down.

"Ah!" came from the major in involuntary exclamation.

"Are you hit, Joe?" asked George.

"Yes, twice. You and Craige save yourselves if you can. It's up with me. I can merely sell my life dearly when they catch up," and he drew his sabre.

George's only reply was to draw his also. At that moment Burton's horse on the other side went down and the young

fellow was thrown violently into the ditch by the roadside, where he lay motionless.

"Curse the red devils!" muttered George, with a swift glance at his friend, but he rode on, watchful of his brother.

He and the major were falling behind, for the latter had ceased to spur his horse and was confused from the shock of his bullet wounds. The yells of the foremost pursuers were in their very ears. But a few more leaps of their horses would bring them abreast. Great clouds of dust rose up, through which George, looking over his shoulder, saw obscure forms and gleaming sabres.

"I'm hit again," cried the major. "Fly, George, fly. I shall fight and die here," and he partially turned his horse to carry out his purpose.

At that instant a pistol bullet struck George's horse, and, stung with the pain, he leaped forward a dozen paces beyond control. As the brave young fellow turned with the impulse to fight and die with his brother, he saw him go down under what seemed many sabre strokes,

and then the dust hid him from view. With the celerity of light the thought flashed through George's mind, "I can do nothing," and in that moment of obscurity he flung himself from his horse, crawled to the roadside and lay motionless, face downward, as if dead. The British troopers, shouting in their mad exultation, swept past, and his ruse was successful.

Although Angus had spurred his horse almost frantically, it took him some little time to reach the head of the column, for all the partisans were pushing their jaded steeds to the utmost. By the time he caught up with the most advanced the wall on the left of the road ended, and there was open to the pursued a rough broken field with clumps of trees which thickened until they formed a part of an extended forest. Into this the partisans streamed, each one striking out for himself and scattering as far as possible.

Angus hesitated a moment. What should he do? As the major's aid, was it not his duty to return to him? He

felt that it was. He had merely been sent forward to give an order, and nothing had been said about his future action. He was not sure that the order was meant to apply to him also, and he had the impression that it was always the duty of an aid to return to his chief. Moreover, Burton and George were still with Graham, as he believed, and it would be disgraceful to ride away and leave them. He felt that he must go back and share the fate of those to whom he was bound by every tie the battle-field permits; but God only knew what the effort cost him. These thoughts passed through his mind in one terrible moment. His brave, faithful will could again control his action, but not his young, unburdened nature, and, crying bitterly, he turned his horse to report to the major, who now lay bleeding and helpless by the roadside. His tears and the dust blinded him as he rode slowly backward, every instant expecting that Graham and his friends would appear among flying partisans. Bullets were whizzing about him. The yells of the

British troopers sounded like the cries of demons. Suddenly his horse was struck by a furiously galloping steed coming from the opposite direction. He had only time to feel that his animal had lost its footing on the ditch side and to take his feet from the stirrups when he fell and lost consciousness. His horse struggled up again and galloped away without him. His head had struck against a stone, and had it not been for his coonskin cap the blow might have been fatal.

When at last he revived, the pursuit had passed. He sat up and looked around, greatly confused and bewildered. Two men down the road were lifting a body over the fence. They appeared familiar. An instant later he sprang up and ran toward them, crying, "Burton! George!"

"By the blessed powers of heaven, if there ain't Gus!" said Burton. "Thank God, we're together again and the major isn't dead either, though he seems all cut to pieces."

"Hasten! Every second counts now,"

cried George. "The enemy may be on us at any moment. See, there's a gully yonder, leading down to a little thicket. You carry our weapons, Gus, and scud away, while we bring on the major. Our only chance is to get to cover as soon as possible."

They reached the gully unobserved, and, working their way down it, soon buried themselves in a dense thicket; then, panting and trembling from excitement, looked into each other's faces. Before they could begin explanations the major feebly gasped, "Water."

Fortunately, there was a little pool near, which had been left from a recent rain. Although it was hot and almost stagnant, it was sweet to the parched lips of the wounded man, and also quenched the intolerable thirst of the others.

"Now, boys," George began, "we must talk in whispers. We shall have to lie close till dark. There ought to be a house somewhere off here to the right, beyond that piece of woods."

"There is," said Angus. "I know it

well, and it isn't more'n four miles from our place. Oh dear! to think we're so near home and yet can't get there!"

"Well, Gus," remarked Burton, with a grim laugh, "our chances are amazingly better than they were a little while ago. There was a time when I said good-by to every one."

"How did you escape?" asked the boy.

"Horse shot, thrown over his head and stunned. That's all my story. As it has turned out, the poor brute couldn't have done me better service. The first one I saw on his feet was George trying to lift the major. Now for your yarn, George."

He explained what the reader already knows, adding, "I played 'possum to such good purpose that I was left for dead." Meanwhile he was examining and bathing his brother's wounds. "Good God!" he exclaimed, "I believe we could save Joe if we could only get him to a house."

"Do you think we could venture out before dark?" asked Angus, wistfully. "I feel as if I could take almost any risk to get away."

"The chances are that we wouldn't get away," George began.

"No, boys," said the major, feebly. "You must stay in cover. I'm in command yet, and I order you to take not one risk on my account."

"Shut up, Joe, and save your strength," said his brother. "You may give all the orders you please, but we shall do what we believe is best for you. You're going to get well and make the red-coats pay for this day."

"As God wills," said the young officer, quietly.

"Well," replied George, brusquely, "I reckon God often wills what we do, if we set our teeth and do our best. Come, Gus, tell us how you appeared on the scene so opportunely."

"I made a baby of myself again," began the boy, hanging his head. "I yelled out the major's orders all along the line, and if any thing could have made the fellows go faster, my terror-stricken voice must have done so. By the time I caught up with the leading

ones there was a wide field on the left, and our men scattered in that. Never in my life was I so tempted to do any thing as I was to ride after them, but I felt that I ought to come back to the major——"

"Come back!" exclaimed George, suspending his work to stare at the boy.

"Oughtn't an aid to come back after giving an order?" asked the boy.

"Well, yes, as a rule, but the order applied to you as well as the rest."

"I didn't know that. I should have been only too glad had I thought so then. I'm glad now it's all turned out as it has."

"Well, well, but how did you escape a split crown?" George asked.

Angus explained, and was surprised to find the major's hand on his as he sat near.

"Brave boy," whispered the wounded man, his eyes eloquent with approval.

Burton put his arm around the lad's neck and said, with a laugh, "Yes, Gus, you made a baby of yourself just as you did

before, when we found you blubbering over one man killed and another captured."

"Please don't praise me any more," said Angus, irritably. "I've been frightened out of my wits twice to-day already."

"I only wish," George began, "that I had a regiment of such—Ha! silence."

A hoarse distant laugh was borne to them on the breeze.

CHAPTER IV.

THE AMBUSCADE.

"THE enemy are returning," said George, "and now comes the critical moment. Burton, crawl to the edge of the thicket, whence you can see the road. If they decide to search this spot, we must take to our heels and lead pursuit away from the major."

In the meantime he cut bushes and stuck them in the ground about the prostrate form of his brother, so thickly that one could scarcely see him even a few feet away. Burton, from the edge of the thicket, saw the British troopers advancing up the road, laughing, jesting, and boasting of their achievements. Only a small squad passed, and our young partisans at last concluded that the main body of their foes had returned to Charlotte by another road. The English sol-

diers, satisfied that none of their own number had been wounded and left on the road, finally disappeared, leaving their dead and disabled foes to be eventually cared for by their friends. At last the region that had witnessed such wild and tragic scenes seemed utterly deserted.

"I begin to think we can venture to strike out for the farm-house," said Burton. "I'm going to crawl to that white oak yonder. From its top I can get a view of the road for a long distance, and also of the surrounding country. I'm becoming famished and actually weak from want of food; and I reckon you two are in the same plight."

"Well, go ahead," said George, "but keep close to the ground. We're in no condition to take risks now."

Burton carried out his plan, scanning not only the road, but also every point within the range of his vision. On the strength of his report it was decided to push for the farm-house at once. Making a chair of their hands, and putting the major's arms about each of their necks,

George and Burton bore him towards the woods, Angus preceding them carrying their rifles (his had been broken in his fall). They were compelled to pause and rest from time to time, but at last reached the shelter of the belt of forest. Here they lay down panting and exhausted, while the poor major seemed scarcely alive.

They had soon much cause to congratulate themselves on their action. It now became clear that the squad of the enemy which had passed had probably been sent back with information, for now the main body appeared on the road with some prisoners. The British had evidently learned the partiality of the Whig militia for cover when pressed, for two dragoons leaped the fence and rode up to and into the thicket a short distance. Then one of them fired a pistol bullet into its recesses. Apparently they were satisfied that no one was concealed there, for they rejoined their comrades on the road.

The boys looked at each other significantly and drew a deep breath of relief.

"Well," said George, with emphasis, "all that looks very harmless at this distance, but I tell you what it is, fellows, we haven't had a nigher graze. If we had been there we'd have run for it, and, used up as we are, wouldn't have a ghost of a chance. Let what we've seen teach us a lesson. If like circumstances happen again, our best course will be to lie close, like a hunted deer in his bed. That would have been our only chance in this case, even though one of us had been hit by that pistol-shot."

At this moment Angus caught a glimpse of two or three negroes, who, some distance away, were peering through the trees at the passing dragoons. He made a circuit with light, stealthy tread, and came up behind them. At first they were much startled, but soon recognized him as "Young Marse McIntire."

"Come with me," he said; "keep well back in the woods. I've got some work for you to do."

The slaves had been brought thither by curiosity to see the terrible British, of

whom they had heard so much, but who, many secretly hoped, might become their deliverers from bondage. This hope was never confirmed by facts, for the English invaders captured slaves as they would horses, and either used or sold them.

Never were strong hands and backs more welcome than on this occasion. The negroes easily carried the major and every weight of which the weary young fellows could divest themselves, and, taking the shortest path through the woods, led the way to the farm-house. Its hospitable mistress was a strong, sensible woman, and a good nurse. The major, almost lifeless from loss of blood, was revived by stimulants and milk, undressed and put to bed. It was then discovered that he had received "nine wounds," and that in one instance his life had been saved by a large buckle which had broken the force of a sabre stroke. Since this gallant young officer, but twenty-one years of age, no longer appears in my story, I may as well mention here that he was tenderly carried to his mother's house

the next day, and thence, after some rest, to a hospital.

Strange to relate he recovered, and within a few brief months raised a company of men and entered on a new career of even greater hardihood. His brother George remained with him until he was safely placed in the hospital, and then began a series of partisan operations on his own account, as we shall soon learn.

Burton and Angus were greatly revived by the refreshment freely given at the farm-house, and as soon as they felt equal to the journey, mounted borrowed horses and rode homeward. Mrs. McIntire and Ella had been almost distracted by anxiety and fear. Terrible stories and still more awful rumors had been related to them, and they dreaded the worst. When, after nightfall, the dogs began to bark, they knew not whether to fly to the woods with the children or to wait in the hope that it was the absent ones returning. Burton gave a long peculiar whistle, a signal of approach that Ella knew well. A moment later mother and daughter were bestow-

ing their welcome in embraces, kisses and tears of joy. Supper had been saved in the hope that the absent would return, and now the fragrant coffee was placed over the fire. Then the boys began a story at which the cheeks of the listeners often paled, and after a generous Southern fashion, each of the young fellows vied in praising the other. The mother became so overwhelmed and faint at the thought of what her boy had passed through, that Angus said, "We won't tell any more to-night. Be content and thankful, mother, for here we both are, safe and sound. Let us tumble into bed, for I feel as if I could sleep a week."

Burton, holding Ella's hand, had been, during the last few moments, the picture of sleepy happiness. Suddenly he bowed his head upon her shoulder and snored audibly. A loud laugh from Angus and the little girls so far awakened him that he stumbled after the boy to their room, and it was high noon the next day before they shook off their lethargy.

After a substantial dinner they proved

how quickly young, healthful bodies can recover from the severest strain and fatigue. Fuller details of their experience were given, but the present and future were so replete with danger that the past was almost forgotten in thoughts of what might happen at any hour. Woeful tidings had been brought from Charlotte and the farm-houses near the village. Some dwellings had been taken possession of and the inmates compelled to provide for rough, brutal men who devoured and appropriated every thing; others had been sacked, and all valuables carried off, while not a few had been burned. With the dispersion of Major Graham's force, all organized resistance had ceased, and the whole region apparently was at the mercy of the invaders.

As these facts became clear, Burton and Angus decided that it was their duty to remain at the house, and, by ceaseless vigilance, either to beat off a small number of marauders, or, if outnumbered, to take the family to a place of shelter and concealment in the woods. Burton rode

over to his plantation and put the place in charge of a trusty overseer, first sending his aunt to a safe refuge farther north. He also brought for Angus a heavy fowling piece, which, loaded with buckshot, and at short range, would be quite as effective as the rifle he had lost. The handsome pistols and sword which had belonged to the British ensign were much admired, and a good supply of ammunition was prepared for the former. One of the pistols was given to Ella, who was making good the brave words she had spoken at the beginning of our story. She caught the high, sanguine spirit of her lover, and it would be difficult to say whether she suffered more from fear, during the days which followed, or enjoyed more from excitement and exultation at the prowess and dauntless behavior of her lover and brother. The stories they heard made it but too sadly evident that even she might be compelled to aid in the defence of their home.

The first paralyzing effect of fear soon passed from the community, and the

people began to understand the conditions under which they must live if the British army remained at Charlotte. If they would go to the village and give their allegiance to the royal officers, they would be unmolested and money would be paid for the provisions they furnished. If they held aloof or were hostile, they would be secure from no wrong or outrage. Yet the great majority of the men not only refused to have dealings with the British, but even began to fire on the foraging parties that were sent out daily. As the people found themselves threatened and insulted, as well as robbed, or saw their families deserting their homes and flying to the woods when the marauding parties approached, hostility became hourly more bitter and aggressive. Food for man and beast, for which the country was scoured, was purchased with blood.

The part taken by Burton and Angus in the recent conflicts soon became known, and other young fellows of the vicinity began to ride in and concoct measures

tending to some scheme of mutual help. It was decided that on eminences near their respective abodes piles of brush should be heaped, so that smoke by day and fire at night should become signals of approaching danger, and the need of assistance.

Meanwhile, at the McIntire farm-house some one was always vigilantly on the watch. The dwelling stood near the edge of a forest, which was bordered by a thick growth of young pines. With timely warning, therefore, the family would have little difficulty in escaping observation, and, having once gained the woods, paths leading to its rugged recesses were well-known. But a very few days elapsed before a British foraging party moved up into the vicinity. Angus, who was on the watch, saw the ominous smoke which was a summons to all the armed men in the region. With a sad heart, Mrs. McIntire witnessed the hasty preparations for departure, but believed that no other course would be right under the circumstances. The day when her

household would need assistance might be near indeed.

As her son and Burton were about to mount, who should ride up but George Graham, and never did any one receive a more honest welcome. "You are just in time," they cried, breathlessly, telling him the emergency.

"Mr. Graham, have you had any dinner?" asked thoughtful Mrs. McIntire, hastening out.

"No; I can eat something as I go along."

Angus hesitated, but Burton shook his head. "There's no help for it, mother," he urged. "Our honor's pledged to lose not a moment. Give George a glass of milk and some bread and meat. He must go at once, for he's worth half a dozen of us."

Laughingly protesting against this view, George declared that Burton was right and that he must dine in the saddle. In a very few moments he was ready, and all three rode away, the mother, Ella and the little girls watching them as long as their

forms were visible. How many, in those troublous times, thus looked their last at loved ones who never returned!

Rest had quieted and steadied Angus's nerves; the necessity for brave, warlike action had become clearer each day. His young, smooth face had often grown hot with manly indignation at the wrongs of which he heard—wrongs which he was now about to witness. Moreover, his past experience was not without effect, and the awful sense of novelty would be absent from future scenes of strife.

The friends were joined on the way by neighbors, across whose backs were slung the rifles which the people of that day knew so well how to use. By the time they had reached the scene of the maraud, these numbers had increased to a score of men and boys, among whom, undaunted by his recent narrow escape, was young Zach Wilson.

They had to approach very warily, for the British foraging party was far too large to permit an open attack. From a wooded knoll some distance from the

house they looked upon proceedings which made their blood boil. All the live-stock on the place was being slaughtered and loaded on wagons, and the barn emptied of grain, hay and corn-leaf fodder. Some of the more ruthless of the soldiery were sacking the house, carrying out every thing that took their fancy. An old white-haired man expostulated and received a blow on his mouth; beneath a tree were huddled a woman and some little children, who were sobbing and wringing their hands. The foragers paid no heed to them, and the whole place resounded with snatches of ribald songs, laughter and oaths.

"I've marked the fellow that struck the old man," said Burton, who had a good field-glass. "I'm going to creep up, and, if possible, get a shot at him. I think I can do it through that cornfield yonder."

"It's the only place where it will be possible," assented George. "The ground is unusually open near the house, and I can see no gap in the line pickets. We

can't strike to any advantage till they're on the march."

"A shot may hasten them," resumed Burton, "and my fingers fairly ache to pull trigger on that fellow. I shall know him by his big, bushy beard. Be ready, boys, to give 'em a volley when I come in on a run with a score or two after me."

"If some one will lend me a long-range rifle, I'll go with you," spoke up Angus. "I'd have to venture in too close with this fowling-piece."

"No, Brother Gus, you can't go. I've promised to try and keep you from all extra risks."

"Stay with me, Gus," said George, decidedly. "You shall have all the fighting you want before night. I know how Burton feels about shooting the wretch who struck the old man; but, as a rule, we shouldn't take too great risks."

The majority of those present were ardent young fellows, who with difficulty restrained their impatience under George's words. The bold purpose of Burton, however, was just suited to their fancy, and

they mounted and rode down through the woods to the base of the hill, so as to be in supporting distance when the youth returned. He bounded away with the fleetness of a deer, and gained the cornfield unperceived.

The videttes of the enemy were scattered along the side of this field next to the house, and Burton soon became convinced that he would have to creep up to its very edge to get within range of the man he had selected as target. This he could not do and retain a chance of safety. While he could be very impetuous under excitement, he was not one to do a foolhardy thing in cool blood. He had about decided to pick off one of the videttes and then escape, when he saw that the whole foraging party was about to withdraw. It had been unmolested, and the officer in command relaxed his caution, called in his sentinels, and prepared to march back to Charlotte. As the pickets retired from the edge of the cornfield, Burton crept up closer and closer, vigilantly alert to catch another

glimpse of the man with the bushy beard. After almost despairing of seeing him again, he suddenly appeared, coming from the house with an armful of bedding, which he placed upon a wagon whose driver yet lingered. The fellow then clambered up to arrange the stolen articles more securely. Burton, who by this time had made his way to the last row of corn, waited no longer, but took deliberate aim and fired. He paused only long enough to see the man start violently, seek to catch hold of something, and fall headlong to the ground, then, crouching, ran toward his partisan support. He had gone but a little way before a dozen dragoons came galloping towards the corn after him. But his friends were equally prompt, and, under George's advice, spread out after entering the field, so as to give the impression of a large force. Rustling and crashing through the corn, their swift advance was like the sound of a tempest, and the British dragoons soon fled, carrying the direful tidings that a multitude of Whigs

was upon them. The drivers of the forage-wagons whipped up their horses, and the heavily loaded vehicles rumbled, groaned and bounced along the stony road. One broke down and was abandoned. The English officer drew his men together into a compact body, and began a rapid retreat. The partisans would have pursued openly, but George checked them, knowing that this course would reveal the smallness of their numbers.

"Follow me," he cried. "By making a short circuit we can come upon them about a mile from here in a piece of woods, and then will have more or less cover all the way to town. If they see how few we are, they'll give us the chase, and I've had enough of such chasing."

He seemed to be the natural leader, and they all followed. In doing so they caught up with another band of partisans, in which were the owner of the place and his two sons, all burning to avenge the wrongs which they had thus far helplessly witnessed. Away they went, like the

wind, down a wood-road, until at last they were in advance of the foraging party; then pushed directly into the forest, riding through a dense growth that would have greatly impeded others than the expert and hardy natives of the region. They struck the road at a point where it wound through the heavy timber, rising from almost impenetrable thickets. Here George set his ambuscade, with orders that the first volley should be directed against the wagon-drivers and such officers as were visible.

"It should be our object to increase the enemy's fears," he said, "and so, if possible, develop a first-class panic. Here's an obscure wood-road, leading back into the forest. With your permission, I'll arrange you on the right of this, in three squads; the first to deliver their fire as I have said, and then to gallop down the road far enough to get a chance to reload. Of course, they'll make a rush for us, when the second squad will give them a volley, and then be off in like manner. When I say the word, give 'em the third

volley. Thus they'll get the impression that the woods are full of us, and will be off, although they outnumber us three to one. And now," he concluded, "silence until my rifle gives the order to fire."

CHAPTER V.

TORY ROBBERS.

FOR a few moments the silence was unbroken on the densely shaded and narrow highway. The startled squirrels ceased their barking notes of surprise and curiosity. Their keen eyes detected the motionless forms, and, suspecting danger, they sped stealthily away. Grouse and partridges knew by instinct that those who had caused their alarm still lurked in cover like themselves.

Sounds from the approaching enemy soon became audible, however; first the rumble of the wagons and then the tramp of horses. A platoon of cavalry formed the vanguard, and George let it ride past unmolested. The wagons next appeared, with infantrymen walking on each side of them; and these were followed by the main body of infantry, another platoon of

cavalry acting as a rear-guard. The undergrowth was so thick in the damp, low spot through which the foraging party was passing, that it had been thought almost impossible to throw out flankers, and the officer commanding had deemed it the best policy to hasten on to a more open country before pursuers could overtake them. The many anxious glances turned towards the dense woods on either side, however, proved that the aspect of the place was any thing but pleasing.

The partisans chafed under George's delay in firing, and were fast losing their self-restraint. Few had received even the first lessons in discipline; they were a chance assemblage of wronged and angry men, who had tacitly accepted a young, untried leader within the last hour; and had he not given the signal from his rifle, in time, his plans would have been disconcerted. Being an unusually good marksman, he fired upon the officer leading the rear-guard of dragoons and the man fell; as also did several of the wagon-drivers and protecting

infantry. There was a moment of consternation, and then the enemy fired a volley into the woods. Bullets flew like hail about the partisans, but the intervening brush prevented accuracy of aim. The rear-guard troopers came galloping forward, and those in the van also returned to the point of attack. The only sound they heard was the receding rush of steeds, as the first squad retired according to George's directions. The other two squads had the courage and steadiness to remain quiet at their leader's warning gesture and command "Wait."

"The cowardly curs have made off," shouted a British officer in the road. "There's no use in trying to follow where only swamp-foxes can run. Other drivers take the reins and push out of this hole. Forward!"

As a response, equally clear, George's voice rang out, "Half of second rank aim at the leading horses on the wagons. Fire!"

Now, down went both horses and men, and the wagons again came to a stand-

still. The officer who had characterized the partisans as "cowardly curs" was on the ground, riddled by buckshot from Angus's fowling-piece. The British, of course, again began firing in the woods, and now that the location of their foes was better localized, their aim was surer, and two or three of the partisans were hit.

"Follow me, all," cried George, and away they went, crashing through the under-growth, towards the wood-road, with bullets flying after them.

By this time the British troopers in advance had found the obscure wood-road at the point where it intersected the highway, and a dozen brave fellows spurred into it. They paid dearly, however, for their temerity, for, crowded together in the narrow passage, they soon revealed to George his opportunity.

"Halt!" he shouted. "To cover on both sides of road. Now don't all aim at the two or three in advance. Pick out your man. Fire!"

Again the irregular volley was so

effective that the pursuit was checked, but only for a moment or two.

"Follow me, all," again cried George, and he led the way until the rear-squad caught up with the others. "We must change our tactics," he resumed. "Scatter. Each man take to the woods for himself, but keep advancing toward Charlotte. When you see a chance for a shot, blaze away and move on. Keep within sound of three whistles from me, which will summon you together again. Away, and each man be an Indian."

The pursuing force came up in time only to hear receding sounds in every direction, and to catch an occasional glimpse of a retreating form here and there. Some, who had not been sufficiently swift in obeying the order, had narrow escapes, but they soon turned the tables on the enemy, and, from places of concealment, began a scattering fire, which increased as opportunity was found to reload.

The English troops soon learned that it was useless to follow. A form, seen

for a moment, melted away; vanished only to indicate its presence in another locality by a fatal shot. They quickly retired, therefore, to the highway again, where there were confused counsels and almost panic. George's orders to fire on the horses had delayed the British troops, but they still clung to the hope of getting off with their plunder. The poor dead and wounded beasts were drawn aside, two wagons abandoned, and, with the rest, the party was again pushing forward. Men were reluctant to mount to exposed positions in the driver's seat, and the partisans soon increased this hesitancy.

The conflict had now taken on a form well suited to the hardy natives, every one of whom had been a hunter. As the troopers retired from the wood-road, they followed and closed in upon their exasperated but almost helpless victims. George's force, however, was so concealed in the forest and so scattered that it afforded no target, no point for definite attack. To the British the woods

appeared full of hornets whose stings were felt, but whose bodies were invisible. Drivers again began to tumble from their seats, horses were again down, and even non-commissioned officers, as sergeants, who in the emergency had to exercise command, were either hit, or else found bullets whizzing near so often as to show that they were singled out.

It was not long before the instinct of self-preservation gained the mastery; traces were cut; each horse mounted by two of the infantrymen, and all the party made a rapid push for the open country. The partisans followed until satisfied that nothing more was to be feared from this ravaging band, and then returned towards the scene of conflict. They drew together in the road with flushed, excited faces, and eyes in which still lingered fierce gleams of passion.

If they were no longer confronted by the enemy, they certainly were compelled to face grave, perplexing questions and duties. Two of their number had been slain outright, and four or five were

wounded. A score of their foes were scattered about, either disabled or dead. There also were the wagons with the plunder of two or three plantations heaped upon them.

Now that the fight was over, all semblance of organization disappeared, and George was but one of the thirty odd neighbors whom the emergency had drawn together. Recognizing the fact, he sat quietly on his horse until his opinion was asked. Some counselled one thing and some another, while all agreed that the British would send out a strong force in the early morning to recover what had been lost, and probably to take vengeance on the families residing near. At last young Zach Wilson piped with his boyish voice, "What we need is some one to take command of the whole kit of us. Gus McIntire is the only officer present. Major Graham promoted him to be ensign in one fight the other day. I heard him, and so did others."

Blushing like a girl, Angus rode forward and cried, "I tell you flatly that I

won't take any command at all, but there's one here that I'll obey to the death, and that's the major's brother, George Graham. Who should now tell us what to do better than he who led us so well in the fight? I move that we all put ourselves under George's orders, and set to work, for we haven't much daylight left."

The boy's words found prompt and general approval, although some of the older farmers looked dubiously at the young fellow named as leader during the coming hours, which would require prudent action instead of fighting. Many knew little about him, and feared rash, immature counsel, while nearly all looked wistfully at the loaded wagons and the weapons of the enemy not yet appropriated.

George, doffing his hat in natural courtesy, rode forward and said, "I accept command for the occasion, since this seems to be the general wish; also for the reason suggested by Gus McIntire—'We have little daylight left.' One head is better than many, or no head at all. I

may seem very young, but I've seen service with my brother during the last year or two, and perhaps experience will make up in part for lacking age. In the first place, we can't carry off these wagons, their tracks would make too plain a trail, but we can take away on our horses a good part of their contents. You are all friends and neighbors; help the robbed ones to hide what they can in the woods, for the woods may become our best refuge. I would advise that meat barrels be secreted, and that as many as possible of these slaughtered cattle go into them; well salted food, powder and lead will be our chief needs. There is no doubt at all but that the enemy will be upon us in the morning, and most likely several houses will be burned. Families and valuables should be well hidden in the early morning. I've ridden far to-day and am tired, but I'll help you a good part of the night. Then we must rest, and every rifle be ready for use to-morrow, for we shall have a hot day."

This speech commended itself to every

one, and his leadership was confirmed by acclamation. The young officer then acted with great promptness and vigor.

"Gus McIntire," he ordered, "you and Zach Wilson go down the road on the traces of the red-coats, and see that there is no danger from that quarter. Don't allow yourselves to be surprised. Burton Craige, take half-a-dozen men and gather up all the dead in one place, and the wounded in another. Give the wounded water, and leave them a supply for the night. If you can find a good rifle, save it for Gus, who has only a shot-gun. The other weapons and ammunition of the enemy should go to those who are poorly supplied. Bring them together to old Father Johnson here, and he'll give 'em out to those who can make a good claim. The rest help me unload and carry off the contents of the wagons."

In a moment all were engaged in their several duties, and men were coming and going until late in the starlit night. Laughing words and jests were not wanting among the younger members of the

party, but the faces of those who had families were anxious or stern. After two hours Angus and Zach were recalled and other patriots sent out. George told the boys to go home, but they would not, and, laughingly defying his authority, declared that they would remain as his body-guard. They were soon asleep under a tree, however.

After Father Johnson had distributed the weapons, he had been directed with a few others to take the two slain partisans and the five who had been wounded to their friends. Thus it happened that by eleven at night but few of the party of the afternoon remained. With the help of these George broke up the wagons, set fire to the *débris*, and piled upon the burning heaps such articles as had not been carried away. The supply of water for the wounded was replenished. Beyond this, and giving the forlorn group some of the stolen food from the wagons, nothing more was done, the partisans rightly believing that their disabled enemies would be cared for by their friends

in the morning. Then all dispersed, George and Burton riding homeward with Angus. In a few moments the scene that had witnessed such tragic and varied activity was left to weird, flickering shadows, and to those who must suffer alone until relieved.

There had been no sleep for Mrs. McIntire and Ella. A ruddy fire blazed on the hearth, and the table fairly groaned with the supper which awaited the returning youths. They were too weary to do justice to it, or to spend many moments in explanation. Their few words were reassuring, however, and their safety sufficient reason for heartfelt thanksgiving. Ella summoned slaves to feed and care for the horses, and established herself as sentinel for the rest of the night.

As had been surmised, the early morning found the British advancing in force. Two or three Whigs who had been on the watch near the village came riding out, warning the inhabitants. Smoking beacon fires were seen far and near, summoning the people to arms. George and his

young friends were soon in the saddle, hastening to the rendezvous. It is needless to dwell upon the events which followed, for in many of their aspects they became of almost daily occurrence. The enemy were too strong to permit any thing like organized resistance, and were also inclined to be savagely vindictive. The houses and barns robbed on the previous day were burned, and other plantations in the vicinity pillaged and left with blackened ruins to show where once had been prosperous homes. The partisans could only hover around seeking opportunities for a shot. And many, too, they found, inflicting no little loss; but the enemy were out in such force that there were plenty to fight while others plundered and destroyed, with mutual, dogged persistence. It so happened that the raid swept away from the McIntire place, and so for a time it escaped. The commander of the British expedition carried out his purposes, and retired with loaded wagons, after having both inflicted and sustained much injury. At last night again settled

down on the distracted region in which were the dead, the dying, the homeless and impoverished. So far from being cowed, the people were only the more bitterly hostile, and bent upon driving the invaders from the land.

During the next few days many deserted their homes, taking their families and all they could carry away farther west and north. Angus entreated his mother to follow this example, but she said: "No; we shall stay and share your fortunes. If any thing happens to you or Burton, Ella and I shall be near to take care of you."

Thus it happened that the McIntire plantation became a sort of headquarters for George and the hardy band that speedily gathered around him and Burton. He and his followers did not cease to help in punishing the foraging parties, which were now so large that the enraged inhabitants could do little else than annoy them. These marauds in search of provisions were a necessity to the British commander, and could not be prevented.

Meanwhile, George and his troop hit upon the most effectual way of injuring the enemy. As a matter of course, General Cornwallis must keep up his communications with his forces and officers in South Carolina. Messengers and detachments were therefore constantly coming and going, bearing despatches. With a vigilance hard to baffle or escape, George and his band often pounced upon these messengers and cowboys, capturing papers of great importance. The British commander was made to feel insecure in his advanced position and uncertain in regard to what was occurring in his rear. From the captured despatches and other sources, the people of the region had learned that he was expecting Colonel Ferguson, with a large force, to join him at Charlotte. It was well-known that this force was composed chiefly of Tories of the most ruthless and blood-thirsty character—men well versed in the tactics of Indian warfare and at the same time ready to commit every possible outrage. They had even been known to destroy

the entire families of those who had incurred their hatred. What wonder then that the inhabitants, already so hardly pressed, felt that if this horde came in upon them from the south-west, their country would be made a desert and they be driven to the mountain fastnesses, where winter and perhaps starvation awaited them? All hearts were oppressed with a growing and terrible dread, and mothers looked upon their children with the feeling that it had been better if they had never been born. In our days of happy security it is impossible to realize the dangers and awful fears which beset our forefathers.

One evening early in October, a dismal rainstorm set in, hastening the gloom of nightfall. George and Burton, with their followers, were away on an expedition, and it was uncertain when they would return. Angus, exhausted and almost ill from a previous foray, had remained at home and had been sleeping all the afternoon. He was awakened by hearing rough voices in the apartment below.

Mrs. McIntire and Ella, while prepar-

ing supper, were rudely interrupted. The soft muddy ground had deadened the fall of horses' feet and the entrance of three armed men was the first intimation of danger. Even the dogs, cowering from the storm in their kennels, had not heard the stealthy approach of the ill-boding visitors. Mrs. McIntire started and trembled as she recognized one of the men —a Tory wretch of the worst type, who had lived near them, but who, of late, was said to be with Ferguson's ruthless horde.

"I reckon yer know me, mistress," began the scoundrel, "and if yer do, yer know I hain't one ter be fooled off with words. Give us some supper mighty sudden. Here, Lem and Bill" (to his companions) "take cheers by the fire and make yerselves ter home. There's nothin' ter be afeard on in this Whig roost. Tarleton's troopers split old McIntire's crown, and there's no one left but the woman and her brats. "Whar's yer boy?"

"He is away," she replied, not hesitating to deceive one who had so little to

know the truth, and hoping for some chance to warn her son to escape.

"So much the better for him. Come, hurry up supper and be civil ef yer want us ter be civil."

"O, God, keep Angus from waking and hearing," prayed the mother, as she tremblingly tried to do their bidding. "Ella, go to your room," she added aloud, "I can do all."

"No," interrupted the Tory, insolently, "let her stay and help. We've got nothin' agin havin' purty gals around or takin' a kiss from 'em either. Hey! Lem, hain't I speakin' fer the meetin'?"

"In course. We wouldn't mind a rigiment of gals as long as their dads and brothers kep' away. But don't pester the woman, for I'm as hungry as a bear. We kin do our kissen arter supper."

In the cupboard, from which Ella took the dishes, was hidden the pistol which had been given her, and the spirited girl felt that she would use it before permitting the touch of their foul lips. Then, seeing how heavily they were armed, she

tried to slip out that she might warn Angus and not have him rushing down to his death. Before she could pass through the door the Tory seized her arm and dragged her back. "Yer don't leave this room," he said, "ter go trolloping off ter some of yer Whig neighbors. Do as we say and yer safe enough. You uns must give us a good supper and all the money and silver-plate yer got and we'll ride away in an hour. If yer play us any tricks we'll burn yer roost over yer heads."

The little girls, who had cowered in a corner thus far, now began to sob aloud.

"Shut up!" shouted the Tory. "Do you uns think we want ter eat with sich caterwaulin' in our ears. Come, fellers, set to. A squar' meal is fust in order. Stand thar, you gal, and keep away from that door. Don't be sich a fool as to think you kin git away."

Two of the men began to eat with the voracity of beasts; but the Tory continued:

"Here, mistress, we want sump'n

stronger'n coffee to wash our supper down. Bring out yer wine or rum or whatever yer got."

"We haven't any spirits," faltered the woman, justly fearing the brutal impulses of such men when under the influence of liquor.

"Yes, yer have. Get it, or we'll smash every thing 'till we find it ourselves."

"I won't give you spirits," she said, desperately.

"We'll soon find out——"

At this moment one of their horses began to kick and neigh furiously.

"Bill, go out and see what the devil is the matter," the Tory ordered.

CHAPTER VI.

THE BATTLE OF THE BEES.

THE disturbance among the horses had an adequate cause, as can soon be explained. The first impulse of Angus, after awakening, was to rush down stairs, but before he carried it out, wise second thoughts occurred to him. He listened long enough to learn the character of the visitors, then slipped on his coat, put a pistol and a long hunting knife in his belt, and, with his loaded shot-gun, stole to the roof of the back porch, whence descent to the ground was easy.

The night was very dark, but familiarity with the place enabled him to steal noiselessly around in his stocking feet. He was soon at one of the windows, saw the group within, and listened a few moments longer to what the ruffians said.

Meanwhile he tried to think of some plan of action. To shoot one would only bring upon the family the worst forms of vengeance from the other two. In some way he must seek to deal with each one separately, and, for a few moments, was at a loss what to do. Then the light from the window gave him a glimpse of the horses tied to the low branches of a neighboring tree, and he adopted the only expedient of which he could think. Securing a very heavy club he went to the tree and leaned his gun against it. Then he pricked a horse with his knife in the hope that but one of the men would come out to investigate. The event, as we have seen, justified his expectation, and, standing a little back in the darkness, he waited with his club.

The man called Bill came out, groping, stumbling and swearing, towards the horses. Angus, whose eyes were accustomed to the darkness, watched for a favorable moment, then delivered the blow with all his force. There was a

heavy thud, the man fell like a log and lay motionless.

The boy, however, had no idea of trusting to the chances of his reviving, and, with straps from a bridle, bound him hand and foot.

The plan had worked so well that Angus determined to try it again, and soon another horse was plunging and neighing from pain. Both the ruffians now sprang from the table with loud oaths, but the Tory said, "You go, Lem, and help Bill, and I'll watch so this gal can't steal off and bring a lot o' Whigs down on us."

"What in thunder's the trouble, Bill?" shouted Lem from the door.

"Horse throwed himself and kicking the others," replied Angus, trying to imitate the gruff voices of the enemies. "Come and help."

"Satan must be to play to change yer voice so 'mazingly."

"It's full o' bacon," mumbled Angus, grasping his club.

The man approached warily, as if sus-

picious, and Angus saw the gleam of a knife in his right hand as he groped his way with the left. "Hang it all, I'm goin' ter git a light," he muttered.

As he turned, Angus stepped lightly forward and struck him. The man heard his step and the downward rush of the bludgeon, but barely had time to put up his arm instinctively to ward off the blow. Although his arm was broken and his head struck with such force as to fell him to the earth, he had time to utter a loud groan before the boy could strike him again.

The Tory heard the groan, rushed to the door and shouted, "Bill, Lem, what's up?"

He only heard the sound of some one moving swiftly. It was Angus getting his gun. The boy was naturally wary, and, under the teaching of hard experience and the training of George, had learned to take every precaution. Fearing that the priming might have been dampened by the storm and that his gun would miss fire, he continued his fleet

steps around to the back of the house and slipped the collar from a large, savage dog, saying, "Back, Wolf, back. Follow close."

The Tory had called to his confederates again and again; enraged and perplexed at receiving no reply, he jumped to the conclusion that the horses had been turned loose, that his confederates were following them, and that Lem had groaned from striking something in the dark. Men in their situation know that losing their horses may easily cost them their lives. In his fear and anger he turned on Mrs. McIntire, and with an oath exclaimed, "There's some cursed treachery goin' on."

"I don't know what you mean," she faltered.

"Yer will in a minute," and whipping out a long knife, he seized her by the throat and demanded, "Who was out there, runnin' off the hosses?"

Seeing the ruffian's grasp on her mother's throat and his threatening knife, Ella hesitated no longer. Snatching her

pistol, she leveled it at his head and cried, "Back! take your hand from my mother, or I'll fire."

At this instant Angus appeared at the door. "Drop your weapons or you're a dead man," he shouted.

The Tory was appalled for a moment, but inured to danger and bloodshed, he did not lose his hardihood. Thinking his companions to be not far off, his one object was to gain time. He now believed that the boy had merely turned the horses loose. That Angus had disabled two strong men without a sound of a struggle did not enter his mind. With a sullen "Oho!" he began, "So you're the imp that's been playin' the mischief with the hosses. Come, my young cockerel, don't yer git yerself and folks inter trouble with that shootin'-iron. Yer'd better listen ter reason and keep a house over yer——"

"Drop your weapons or I'll shoot," the boy again shouted.

Indeed he would have fired at once had not the cunning villain stood in a line with Mrs. McIntire.

"Stand aside, mother," cried Angus.

Ella, now that her brother appeared, was momentarily off her guard, and the wary eye of the Tory observed the fact. With a singularly quick movement he struck her arm a blow which sent the pistol flying from her hand, then threw his arms around her and held her in front of him before the boy's leveled weapon. "Now shoot ef you dare, yer blasted Whig brat," he snarled, and then shouted, "Lem, Bill, here quick. Knock this boy on the head. I'll put my knife inter yer sister ef yer don't clar out with that gun."

Crouching behind Angus was the great black dog, and now the boy stood aside and said, "In and at him, Wolf."

The huge dog sprang forward with a savage growl; the Tory tried for one bewildered moment to keep the girl in front of him, but the dog seized him by the arm and Ella broke away. Wolf then leaped for his throat, but the Tory sprang backward and was about to strike the animal with his knife, when there was a flash, a loud report, and the room was full

of smoke. As it cleared a little they saw the dog shaking the Tory's lifeless form.

Mrs. McIntire rushed to her son's arms and shrieked, "The other men will come and kill you."

"No, mother," he said, grimly, "I've settled with them, too, but must make sure of it. Stop your screaming, children; there's no more danger. Come, Wolf."

There was a sound of galloping horses in the lane, and Burton's whistle revived Ella, who was almost fainting. A moment later she was sobbing in her lover's arms.

"Merciful heaven! Gus, what's happened?" cried George, riding to the veranda steps and looking within.

"Well," said the boy, brokenly, and sitting down, "I reckon you may well speak of merciful heaven. If you hadn't come I could have held out a little longer, but——you must give me time," and he sank exhausted and faint on the steps.

Mrs. McIntire was at his side in a moment with a glass of wine. "Have

patience, George," she said. "There were two other men. What Angus could have done to them——"

"There, there," said the boy, "it'll pass in a moment. Why the mischief do I have to act like a baby at such times! Get a light and see what you'll find by that tree yonder."

The two unconscious Tories were found barely breathing, for the boy had brought down the heavy club with all the strength which terror inspires. Explanations were soon given and the whole band gathered around Angus with the heartiest plaudits.

"Oh! shut up," said the boy irritably. "I can't stand any more to-night. Mother and the girls are safe and that's enough."

"Here, George," cried Burton, "let us pitch this carrion out," indicating the Tory's body. "Why, it's Rufe Hackett, one of the bloodiest Tories in the State."

"Hold on, Burton," said George, excitedly, "Hackett, did you say? Why, he was with Ferguson. As I live, I believe he was sent with despatches to

Cornwallis, because he knew the country so well. Here, two of you men, carry him out on the veranda where Mrs. McIntire and the girls can't see him, for he must be searched thoroughly."

George's surmise was correct. Despatches of vital importance were found stitched in the lining of his shirt. Ferguson had written plainly of the hostile forces closing upon him and of his urgent need of help. It need not be said that Cornwallis never received those despatches, and that the essential aid was never sent. How the hardy mountaineers smote the British and the Tory horde and killed their leader is one of the best known chapters of Southern history. The British commander did hear of the overwhelming disaster, and was not long in deciding that he had better leave the "hornets' nest" of Charlotte and its vicinity as soon as possible.

Mrs. McIntire, her household and her brave partisan friends, quieted down in time and obtained sorely needed rest. The two prisoners whom Angus had dis-

abled recovered eventually, and were then tried by a rude, secret court-martial, condemned and shot; George and others saying sternly, "We shall permit no Tory outrages in this county."

Every day added to the embarrassment of the British commander at Charlotte; every ruthless maraud to procure supplies increased the anger and hate of the surrounding people. The country had been ravaged far and near, and yet the McIntire plantation had as yet escaped. It was not very accessible, but eventually reports that a partisan band had made it a sort of headquarters, drew attention to the place, and to the hope of plunder was added the desire to punish those who had won the reputation of making much trouble. George and his followers had been very wary, and there were few in that region who would inform against them. The British authorites, therefore, had no clear idea of the force which might be found in the region, and deemed it prudent to send with the forage wagons an escort of four hundred

men. They started before light in the morning and moved rapidly and quietly, in the hope of effecting a surprise. While they almost succeeded in this respect, they were treated to several rather surprising experiences themselves before the day was over.

George and his men had returned the night before from a long and fatiguing ride, and were sleeping heavily well back in their forest shelter. Angus had watched at the farm-house until dawn began to brighten and then had been joined by Ella, who said that she and her mother would be vigilant while getting breakfast. The tired boy was only too glad to be relieved, and was soon in deep slumber. The sun rose brightly, adding to the golden hues of the autumnal foliage. The morning was so quiet and genial that it was hard to entertain thoughts of danger, and Ella, whose heart, in spite of its sorrows and fears, would persist in being light, was singing at her tasks. For a brief time she forgot the need of watchfulness, then, recalling

her duty, stepped out on the veranda. To her horror she saw a large British force not far distant, rapidly approaching. The enemy, during the latter part of the march, had been guided through a wood-road, which had concealed the movement.

"O, mother!" cried the terror-stricken girl. "See! What shall we do?"

Mrs. McIntire gave but one startled glance, then said firmly, "Take the little girls and fly to the woods—to George Graham and Burton. I will follow with Angus. Leave every thing—run."

Ella obeyed, while her mother almost dragged Angus from his bed. Fortunately he was dressed, and but one swift glance through the window convinced him that he must yield to his mother. Snatching his weapons, he had barely time to escape with her through the rear door to the shelter of the low pines, before the British entered the yard about the house.

With the fleet steps of fawns, Ella and her little sisters sped deeper and deeper

in the forest until challenged by a startled and sleepy sentinel.

"Take me to Burton—to George Graham," she said breathlessly. "The house is attacked."

Burton sprung from his leafy couch instantly at the sound of Ella's voice. In a moment George and the others were on their feet and around the girl. An instant later they were swiftly on the way to rescue Angus and his mother, or to cover their retreat. The speedy appearance, however, of the fugitives brought immense relief, and then was held a hasty council of war. The result of this was that Mrs. McIntire, Ella and the children were sent deep into the forest to a secure refuge, while George and his little band, of which only eleven were present that morning, were stealing with wary, noiseless approach upon the marauders. They glided from tree to tree, thicket, and copse, until at last, unperceived, they were concealed among the low pines not far from the house.

The British officer commanding had

found the place deserted, for the negroes also had fled. He concluded that if men had been lurking about the place they were either absent, or, frightened by the largeness of his force, had fled with the family. The low pines and immediate forest were instantly searched, but without revealing either fugitives or concealed enemies. The partisans had not yet approached. Taught by harsh experience, however, the British captain in command resolved to load his wagons and depart speedily, fearing that on his return he would hear the familiar crack of deadly rifles from foes who would not be long in gathering. Ordering his men to use despatch in sacking the house and outbuildings, and in gathering up the cattle, he coolly sat down, with some of his subordinates, to the breakfast which had not been prepared for them.

The British soldiers needed no urging, for, while they were greedy for plunder, they knew the price in blood usually paid for it, and were anxious to return before the people of the region had time to gather.

When, therefore, the partisans drew sufficiently near to observe what was taking place, the wagons were being rapidly loaded and the place was dismantled. George saw that the English force was large, compact, and alert, that the fire from his small band could not prevent the mischief, and might lead to the immediate burning of the dwelling. So, in the hope of saving this, he directed his men to remain quiet until the marauding party was well away from the place.

The fact that they were not interfered with, and that no enemies were seen hovering in the distance, so far from creating confidence, began to cause uneasiness in the British force. It was feared that the Whigs were preparing to strike a heavy blow on the homeward march. Accordingly the crowded door-yard was full of bustle and activity. Men were carrying bedding, furniture and provisions from the house, and forage and grain from the barns. Cattle were bellowing, pigs squealing, and chased chickens adding to the Babel-like uproar. The men also, with the

recklessness of soldiers, did not scruple to laugh, jest and chaff each other, although aware that the light of another day might never gladden their eyes.

Angus was white with rage and indignation as, peering through a thick pine, he saw the havoc. He recognized every familiar article that was carried to the wagons, every animal that was slaughtered, and knew well how terribly impoverished they all would be. Yet he suffered the deepest pang when the faithful dog, Wolf, was bayoneted, and involuntarily his rifle was raised to shoot the man who gave the thrust. George's hand upon his arm restrained him.

"Be patient, Gus," said his friend. "I know it's hard, but they shall pay for this. Ah! what's up now?"

There seemed to be sudden and dire confusion among the British soldiers, and some of the horses began to kick and plunge so violently as to be scarcely manageable. The confusion extended like a contagion: men ran from a certain point covered their faces with their arms or

hats, and danced around as if in sudden pain.

"By all that's lucky!" whispered Angus, "they've upset a bee-hive."

"Oh, isn't that rich!" said Burton, shaking with suppressed laughter. "George, George, the bees have begun the battle; let us sting the robbers also."

"Wait, wait a moment," said George, too anxious and eager even to smile in his responsibility, but keenly observant. "This is giving the affair a new aspect. Perhaps we had better join our friends, the bees."

But the enraged insects waited not for help. Their excitement extended to the neighboring hives, and increasing swarms poured out, each armed with a poisoned weapon. The British troops had no armor, no means of defence, and the antics of those stung and of others seeking to avoid their swiftly darting foes were so very absurd that the partisans, with difficulty, restrained a merriment which would have revealed their presence. The British captain stood in the doorway of

the house, endeavoring to give orders, but was so convulsed with laughter at the plight of his men that for a moment he too was almost helpless. A great, red-faced, burly sergeant who had charge of the wagon train, had slipped into the house, after his superiors had breakfasted, for a cup of coffee. Catching a glimpse, through the window, of the disorder among his men and horses, and ignorant of the cause, he rushed out in a towering rage with his heavy whip into the very centre of the "busy bees." They appeared to regard him as the author of the whole disturbance, and acted accordingly. His oaths and expostulations were arrested abruptly. Three or four stings pierced his coppery nose, and he clapped his hands over it with something like a howl. Then a perfect swarm attacked him in the rear, and again his hands sought to protect the parts assailed, while he yelled some incoherent order. At this instant a headlong bee flew into his open mouth and stung promiscuously. The poor wretch, to the immense amuse-

ment of those looking on from a safe distance, fairly began to dance a hornpipe in his anguish. Yet the situation grew momently more serious. The British troops in a widening circle were in disorder, while the horses attached to the wagons were plunging frantically.

At this critical moment orders from George changed the scene from comedy to tragedy. Passing along his little line, he said in a low voice, "Take deliberate aim; pick out officers if possible. I shall shoot the captain. Fire when I do."

A moment later there was a ringing volley; the captain dropped on the veranda before his men; nine others fell and two horses went down.

CHAPTER VII.

PARTING BLOWS AND WEDDING BUGLES.

THE effect of the fatal volley fired by George and his followers astonished the partisans beyond measure. They fully expected that a rush would be made for them, and, anticipating this, all retired rapidly into the woods, that they might have time to reload. Finding that they were not followed, they cautiously returned, and soon discovered the British troops in rapid retreat. The wagon containing most of the household articles was abandoned, for the horses attached to it had been shot. Detailing Angus, Burton and two or three others to look after the house and family, George and the rest were soon mounted and following the foraging party.

The stinging bees had caused much disorder in the British force; and when

its commander, two of his subordinates, and some of the men were slain, a feeling of alarm, approaching to panic, ensued. There had been an uneasy sense of danger in the air, and George, by his tactics, had unconsciously enhanced it. Moreover, the vicinity of the dwelling had become unendurable. Honey-bees are capable of becoming as "mad" as the "hornets" with which the region became so famously associated, and in this instance they rendered most valuable assistance. In fact they bundled the British troops out of that yard more quickly than a position was ever evacuated before. The officer on whom the command devolved gave directions for a rapid retreat to Charlotte, and never were orders obeyed with more alacrity. After starting he remembered that the house had not been burned, and he sent back a few men to perform this act of vengeance. The squad returned very reluctantly. As they approached the dwelling, the bees assailed them with such concentrated fury, that they fled without accomplishing their purpose.

Meanwhile the news of the maraud had spread, and the men and older boys of the region, as usual, were flocking to the line of march. George eventually had a respectable force in hand, and, following on flank and rear, he hounded the British party almost to the suburbs of Charlotte.

It was very evident that nothing more was to be feared from the invaders that day, and Angus and Burton soon posted off to reassure Mrs. McIntire and Ella, and to conduct them, with the children, back to their home. They were so thankful to find it unburned, and its defenders unharmed, that no time was spent in regret over its wild disorder. The abandoned wagon contained most of the articles of which it had been despoiled, and after the bees quieted down, Angus and Burton restored them to their places. That which had been carried off was a trifling loss compared with the safety of the dwelling itself, or any of its inmates.

Many of the chickens had escaped, and so had a large proportion of the pigs,

which, at that season, ran almost wild in the woods. The horses and cattle about the barn had been taken, but there were others in distant fields, and the steed which Angus rode was picketed with others belonging to the band well back in the forest. Therefore, while Mrs. McIntire had suffered serious loss, and a severe shock from anxiety and alarm, she had fared, thanks to the bees and her partisan friends, far better than many of her neighbors. With the aid of Angus and Burton, Ella prepared another and a famous breakfast, and when George and his party returned they were feasted to their heart's content.

First as rumor, then as glad certainty, the news of the battle of King's Mountain, the death of Ferguson, and the capture of his threatening force, spread rapidly. There was general and heartfelt rejoicing among the the people, and gloom and dismay in the British army. Cornwallis found that the country would no longer support his troops, and that such provisions as were obtained must be

paid for in an ever-increasing price of blood. His communications with the South were threatened, and only the largest convoys of despatches and supplies came through in safety. Seven days after the battle, which turned the whole tide of Southern warfare, he began in the night his confused and hurried retreat. The people were hoping, expecting, praying, for this event. They did all in their power to hasten it by their bitter and unrelenting hostility, and when it took place they acted.

George and his followers had determined to take such a final leave of their foes as would not be forgotten. He and other partisan leaders in the vicinity were in secret communication with Charlotte, impatiently awaiting their opportunity. On the evening of the fourteenth of October one of his scouts came galloping in with the joyful tidings that the British were evidently preparing to decamp that night. Angus and Burton instantly darted off to an eminence not far from the house, and soon two separate and dis-

tinct bonfires were blazing. Their torch seemed to kindle numerous other beacons as far as the eye could reach, until they appeared no larger than stars on the horizon. By these fires the hopes of the people throughout the region were kindled. Possibly, on the morrow, those now hiding in forests might return to such homes as were left to them, and others begin to rebuild from blackened ruins a new shelter from wintry storms already near.

But the blazing beacons had a more immediate significance. Every man and boy who had a weapon and could use it was expected to turn out now with the stern purpose of giving the invaders one more proof that the "Hornets' Nest" was no place for marauding foreign soldiery. The moonlight revealed groops at every farmhouse door; men were seen saddling, mounting and saying farewell in hot haste. Lonely roads echoed to the swift tread of horses' feet. Singly, in twos, threes and dozens the hard riders concentrated towards Charlotte. Slung across the back of each gleamed the long

deadly rifle barrel. Those who had no mount pursued short cuts through fields and paths in forests to the same objective point.

Cornwallis saw the ominous signs of coming trouble and hastened his departure. The movement was not a quiet and orderly retirement, but a retreat begun and conducted in dire confusion. It might have been a disastrous rout had the hardy mountaineers who defeated Ferguson hung upon his rear and flanks that night. As it was, the unorganized populace of the county inflicted serious injury and gave his lordship such a distaste for the region that neither he nor any other officer ever led a British force thither again.

George with his followers, now numbering nearly two score, hung close upon the British rear, ready, like hawks, to swoop upon their prey. His thoughts followed a wagon train, carrying the baggage and supplies of the army. It was heavily guarded, and there was no use of making any attempt upon it as long as the country

remained somewhat open, and permitted its escort to see its assailants. He knew, however, that before very long it would have to enter a timbered region traversed by a narrow road, and he laid his plans accordingly. Burton was directed to take command of the main body of the partisans, to follow the rear-guard as closely as he dared, to keep up a galling fire and so increase the disposition of the British troops, already strong, to get ahead as fast as possible. If they showed any signs of giving way, he was to charge them. Then with Angus and a dozen others George made a rapid detour, struck a wood-road in the forest, and cautiously, yet swiftly, approached the wagon train somewhat in the rear of its centre. He and his men were lost in the shadows of the dense pines, which sighed mournfully in the night wind, as if presaging the bloody scenes soon to be enacted. While the partisans were hidden, the lumbering wagon train was seen passing on the road in dim outline.

"Gus," he said, "you and Eph Tom

kins shoot two of the horses and stop the train. The rest of us will then act according to circumstances."

The drivers were urging the horses to the utmost, feeling that every foot of progress was so much gained in the race for safety. A general sense of apprehension, enhanced by the hurried night departure, pervaded every mind. The beacon fires, the frequent rifle reports in the distance, added also to the alarm of the infantry who walked beside the wagons. Therefore, when out of the deep gloom of the adjoining forest, leaped two flashes and horses fell, stopping two wagons, the immediate escort, recalling much bitter experience, began to fear the worst.

An officer rushed up and ordered a charge in the direction of the shots. He had scarcely spoken before he fell under a bullet from George's rifle. Then a brave sergeant sprang forward, crying, "Follow me." Under his example many rushed after him.

"Six steps forward and give 'em a volley; then all scatter," George ordered.

The sergeant and two or three of his men went down. Then the woods rang with a score of shots from the British infantry, but the dusky, flying forms in the distance presented no target.

Pressed upon by Burton and his constantly increasing band, the rear cavalry guard had, unconsciously, drawn nearer and nearer the train. In the breast of each man was a secret impulse to get away from a region so full of hostility and danger, and this impulse had the effect of quickening the retreat. When, therefore, the firing caused by George and his followers was heard, the commanding officer found it easy to believe that it was his duty to advance rapidly to the point of attack. His order "Trot, march!" was gladly obeyed.

Other orders were given, however, on which they had not counted. Burton, keenly on the alert, also heard the firing and saw the quick forward movement of the dragoons before him. Instantly came his shout, "Into the road, flankers Those who have sabres to the front

March four abreast. Yell like catamounts; charge!"

Away they went, his thirty odd men making noise enough for a hundred, The British dragoons were appalled at this sudden and apparently organized attack upon their rear. It did not indicate the helter-skelter pursuit of raw recruits, but rather the action of trained Continental cavalry of unknown numbers. There was no chance, no time to investigate in the narrow road, and by such light as was given by the moon. The firing and confusion in front were also increasing. After momentary hesitation the rear-guard gave way to panic, which spread like wildfire to the infantry escort. One and all fled forward or dashed into the forest to escape the furious onset of the partisans. Some were cut down, others surrendered. Still more escaped through the woods, while the majority, by dint of hoof and foot, reached the heavy British support, which was sent back to repel the attack. Burton, however, had attained his wish, and enjoyed

the wild excitement of riding "straight at his enemies, sabre in hand."

It will be remembered that it had been George's tactics to cut the wagon train in two. At the point where the first two horses had been shot, he and his followers kept up such an effective fire that nothing could be done. The partisans were on foot, having left their steeds well back in the forest. Dodging from tree to tree, their locality was unknown except as flashes from their rifles revealed it momentarily and the effort to find and dislodge them was soon abandoned. Meanwhile the drivers beyond the break in the train had urged forward their teams on the run and so had escaped, for it was George's policy to produce as wide a gap as possible between the wagons he had cut off and those permitted to pass on. The desperate efforts made, for a brief time, to get the delayed wagons forward were frustrated. The moment any one appeared prominent in giving useful orders or effective service he was shot. Then came the mad rush of the flying

dragoons; drivers abandoned their teams, and, with the infantry escort, joined the forward stampede, the partisans following until checked by the British support already mentioned. They did not give way before this, but taking to the woods, began such an effective fire, that the enemy again retreated, abandoning the wagons finally. In order to make sure of their prey, however, a place was speedily found where the vehicles could be turned, and soon twenty heavily laden wagons were headed toward Charlotte again, as they had been nineteen days before. Now, however, the drivers and escort were exultant Whigs, proud and happy over their success, and feeling that they had captured something that would make good, in part, their terrible losses.

The haggard, careworn villagers, whose lives had been made a burden by the British occupation, greeted the cavalcade in the dawn with shouts of rejoicing. Friends and relatives, long parted, embraced each other, and even wept for joy. Indeed, never before, in the old North

State, had there been such a general hand-shaking.

George Graham modestly declined to receive any of the spoils himself. That which would be of service to the cause was stored for public use, and the rest distributed among those who had suffered the greatest losses. Except the dead, the wounded, and a few prisoners, no British soldiers remained in the region. The first were buried and the others treated with a humanity which they had not always shown.

Early in the day, Angus and Burton returned to those who had retained many of their thoughts, even in the thick of battle; and never had they received a gladder welcome. George, and a few of his most intimate followers, joined them in the evening, and, although all were exceedingly wearied, they were too excited and happy for immediate sleep.

"Well," said George, leaning back in his chair, "such a supper as I've just eaten ought to make one content with his lot and at peace with all the world.

That'll be my condition, I reckon, for the next twelve hours. Then I shall put out for a visit to Joe, since the news will do him more good than medicine. But I shall be back soon, and then, fellows, I'm going to raise a troop for the regular service. There shall be no sitting down in the chimney corner for me until the red-coats have been driven to their ships."

There was not one present but wished to serve under George. Some were so young, however, that they felt they must first consult their parents.

Burton now gave George a significant glance, indicating that something should be said which had been agreed upon beforehand. "Oh," resumed George, good-naturedly, "I know how it will be. Some can ride with me to future exploits, and some can not, and ought not to. I reckon the duty and inclination of each will soon be clear. But before we break up our old relations I feel that something should be done to celebrate our happy escapes and general good fortune—some-

thing that will complete our experiences together and leave the pleasantest of memories. In order to bring this about, I shall have to appeal to our kind hostess and her fair daughter. They both know that I'd bite my tongue out before I'd ask a favor which was not for their good as well as for mine. Yet I am going to ask something that will be a great favor to me, and a far greater one to my friend, Burton Craige, and that is that we celebrate our successes and relief from daily and hourly fear of every kind of wrong by an old-fashioned country wedding. Nay, good Mistress McIntire, do not start. I know you are about to say that they are too young, and all that; but I can tell you that there's many a graybeard in the country that is not so much of a man as Burton. You are left without a husband; he without father or mother, and the future is uncertain to us all. These are not ordinary, peaceful times. We must secure what we can while we can. What's more, when Burton gives Ella his name, he endows

her with a goodly property, and provides for her future, as he wishes to do, no matter what may happen to him."

"Yes, mother, dear," cried Burton, "George knows how to talk and has expressed my wishes — my dearest hopes. Before I ride away with him to new dangers I want to call Ella my wife, and give her all I have in the world, with myself."

"And we, Mistress McIntyre," said the other young men in chorus, "wouldn't miss the chance of dancing at Burton's wedding for all the pay we ever expect from Congress."

"Well, well," said the good woman, smiling, yet wiping tears from her eyes, "how can I refuse any thing to such friends as you have been to me and mine! If Burton so wishes it—Angus, you have done so much towards taking your father's place, that you, after all, are the one to speak."

"Oh, Burton's talked me over," replied the boy, laughing, and his words found an echo in a merry shout of exultation.

Ella, meanwhile, had been standing a little aloof, blushing like a Carolina rose as she was. Now she tossed her head indignantly, and said, "But I've not been talked over. I reckon I've something to say in the matter."

Every young trooper sprung from his chair, overturning some in their eagerness, and, led by Burton, knelt at her feet. She tried to avert her face and look aggrieved, but their comical position and outstretched hands upset her gravity. Her mouth twitched, then out chimed a mellow peal of laughter. Instantly Burton seized her hand, carried it to his lips, and, standing by her side, declared that he was ready for the ceremony at once.

It was eventually arranged that the wedding should take place a week from that day, and that the happy pair should spend their honeymoon at Burton's plantation. The days passed swiftly in the bustle of preparation. Burton's home was put in order to receive its young mistress, his aunt returning from her

Northern refuge to superintend arrangements, and to do honor to the occasion. Invitations were sent out to relatives, friends and neighbors: the woods and plantations scoured for the materials of the feast.

The sun of the twenty-second of October sank below a cloudless horizon. There was no chill in the soft Southern air. As the shadows deepened, slaves piled wood on the kindling fires in the dooryard, and the assembling guests hung lanterns in the trees. The good Scotch Presbyterian pastor was present, unbending his wonted gravity to smiles and words in harmony with the occasion. Neighbors trooped thither from far and near, glad of a little natural mirth after their sad experiences. The young Whig troopers, with George at their head, were ranged together, wearing their side-arms, and with tassels of pine nodding in their caps for plumes.

At last, leaning on the arm of Angus and followed by her mother, little sisters and relatives, Ella came down the veranda

steps to the open, lighted space, where Burton and his aunt awaited her, and then, as was befitting the bride of a partisan soldier, was married on the green sward, beneath the starlit sky. During the service all hats were reverently removed; at its conclusion the bugles rang out loud and merrily. These were the wedding-bells. Soon after the open space between the fires was cleared, the initial tuning of fiddlers was heard, and Burton and Ella led a score of couples down the green in the graceful minuet.

With a parting glance at the picture, with its fantastic lights and shadows, its chance and varied groupings, its costumes, now strange to our eyes, we take leave of those whom we have followed through very different scenes. Among the many faces, some distinct in the broad glare and others dim in the dusky background, there is none from which we turn so regretfully as that of Angus McIntire. He looks very boyish as he stands with parted, smiling lips and quietly observant eyes,

but the manner in which his mother leans upon his arm proves that he has already won the best possession of manhood—trust.

THE END.

A CHRISTMAS-EVE SUIT.

THE Christmas holidays had come, and with them a welcome vacation for Hedley Marstern. Although as yet a briefless young lawyer, he had a case in hand which absorbed many of his thoughts,—the conflicting claims of two young women in his native village on the Hudson. It must not be imagined that the young women were pressing their claims, except as they did so unconsciously, by virtue of their sex and various charms. Nevertheless, Marstern was not the first lawyer who had clients over whom midnight oil was burned, they remaining unaware of the fact.

If not yet a constitutional attorney, he was at least constitutionally one. Falling helplessly in love with one girl simplifies matters. There are no distracting pros and cons,—nothing required but a concentration of faculties to win the en-

slaver, and so achieve mastery. Marstern did not appear amenable to the subtle influences which blind the eyes and dethrone reason, inspiring in its place an overwhelming impulse to capture a fortuitous girl because (to a heated imagination) she surpasses all her sex. Indeed, he was level-headed enough to believe that he would never capture any such girl; but he hoped to secure one who promised to make as good a wife as he would try to be a husband, and, with a fair amount of self-esteem, he was conscious of imperfections. Therefore, instead of fancying that any of his fair acquaintances were angels, he had deliberately and, as some may think, in a very cold-blooded fashion, endeavored to discover what they actually were. He had observed that a good deal of prose followed the poetry of wooing and the lunacy of the honeymoon; and he thought it might be well to criticise a little before marriage as well as after it.

There were a number of charming girls in the social circle of his native

town; and he had, during later years, made himself quite impartially agreeable to them. Indeed, without much effort on his part he had become what is known as a general favorite. He had been too diligent a student to become a society man, but was ready enough in vacation periods to make the most of every country frolic, and even on great occasions to rush up from the city and return at some unearthly hour in the morning when his partners in the dance were not half through their dreams. While on these occasions he had shared in the prevailing hilarity, he nevertheless had the presentiment that some one of the laughing, light-footed girls would one day pour his coffee and send him to his office in either a good or a bad mood to grapple with the problems awaiting him there. He had in a measure decided that when he married it should be to a girl whom he had played with in childhood and whom he knew a good deal about, and not to a chance acquaintance of the world at large. So, beneath all his diversified gallantries

he had maintained a quiet little policy of observation, until his thoughts had gradually gathered around two of his young associates who, unconsciously to themselves, as we have said, put in stronger and stronger claims every time he saw them. They asserted these claims in the only way in which he would have recognized them,—by being more charming, agreeable, and, as he fancied, by being better than the others. He had not made them aware, even by manner, of the distinction accorded to them; and as yet he was merely a friend.

But the time had come, he believed, for definite action. While he weighed and considered, some prompter fellows might take the case out of his hands entirely; therefore he welcomed this vacation and the opportunities it afforded.

The festivities began with what is termed in the country a "large party"; and Carrie Mitchell and Lottie Waldo were both there, resplendent in new gowns made for the occasion. Marstern thought them both charming. They

danced equally well and talked nonsense with much the same ease and vivacity. He could not decide which was the prettier, nor did the eyes and attentions of others afford him any aid. They were general favorites, as well as himself, although it was evident that to some they might become more, should they give encouragement. But they were apparently in the heyday of their girlhood, and thus far had preferred miscellaneous admiration to individual devotion. By the time the evening was over Marstern felt that if life consisted of large parties he might as well settle the question by the toss of a copper.

It must not be supposed that he was such a conceited prig as to imagine that such a fortuitous proceeding, or his best efforts afterward, could settle the question as it related to the girls. It would only decide his own procedure. He was like an old marauding baron, in honest doubt from which town he can carry off the richest booty,—that is, in case he can capture any one of them. His overtures

for capitulation might be met with the "slings and arrows of outrageous fortune," and he be sent limping off the field. Nevertheless, no man regrets that he must take the initiative, and he would be less than a man who would fear to do so. When it came to this point in the affair, Marstern shrugged his shoulders and thought, "I must take my chances like the rest." But he wished to be sure that he had attained this point, and not lay siege to one girl only to wish afterward it had been the other.

His course that evening proved that he not only had a legal cast of mind but also a judicial one. He invited both Miss Mitchell and Miss Waldo to take a sleigh ride with him the following evening, fancying that when sandwiched between them in the cutter he could impartially note his impressions. His unsuspecting clients laughingly accepted, utterly unaware of the momentous character of the trial scene before them.

As Marstern smoked a cigar before retiring that night, he admitted to himself

that it was rather a remarkable court that was about to be held. He was the only advocate for the claims of each, and finally he proposed to take a seat on the bench and judge between them. Indeed, before he slept he decided to take that august position at once, and maintain a judicial impartiality while noting his impressions.

Christmas Eve happened to be a cold, clear, star-lit night; and when Marstern drove to Miss Waldo's door, he asked himself, "Could a fellow ask for anything daintier and finer" than the red-lipped, dark-eyed girl revealed by the hall lamp as she tripped lightly out, her anxious mamma following her with words of unheeded caution about not taking cold, and coming home early. He had not traversed the mile which intervened between the residences of the two girls before he almost wished he could continue the drive under the present auspices, and that, as in the old times, he could take toll at every bridge, and encircle his companion with his arm as they bounced over

the "thank-'ee mams." The frosty air appeared to give keenness and piquancy to Miss Lottie's wit, and the chime of the bells was not merrier or more musical than her voice. But when a little later he saw blue-eyed Carrie Mitchell in her furs and hood silhouetted in the window, his old dilemma became as perplexing as ever. Nevertheless, it was the most delightful uncertainty that he had ever experienced; and he had a presentiment that he had better make the most of it, since it could not last much longer. Meanwhile, he was hedged about with blessings clearly not in disguise, and he gave utterance to this truth as he drove away.

"Surely there never was so lucky a fellow. Here I am kept warm and happy by the two finest girls in town."

"Yes," said Lottie; "and it's a shame you can't sit on both sides of us."

"I assure you I wish it were possible. It would double my pleasure."

"I'm very well content," remarked

Carrie quietly, "as long as I can keep on the right side of people——"

"Well, you are not on the right side to-night," interrupted Lottie.

"Good gracious!" thought Marstern, "she's next to my heart. I wonder if that will give her unfair advantage;" but Carrie explained:

"Of course I was speaking metaphorically."

"In that aspect of the case it would be a shame to me if any side I have is not right toward those who have so honored me," he hastened to say.

"Oh, Carrie has all the advantage—she is next to your heart."

"Would you like to exchange places?" was the query flashed back by Carrie.

"Oh, no! I'm quite as content as you are."

"Why, then, since I am more than content—exultant, indeed,—it appears that we all start from excellent premises to reach a happy conclusion of our Christmas Eve," cried Marstern.

"Now you are talking shop, Mr

Lawyer—Premises and Conclusions, indeed!" said Lottie; "since you are such a happy sandwich, you must be a tongue sandwich, and be very entertaining."

He did his best, the two girls seconding his efforts so genially that he found himself, after driving five miles, psychologically just where he was physically—between them, as near to one in his thoughts and preferences as to the other.

"Let us take the river road home," suggested Lottie.

"As long as you agree," he answered, "you both are sovereign potentates. If you should express conflicting wishes, I should have to stop here in the road till one abdicated in favor of the other, or we all froze."

"But you, sitting so snugly between us, would not freeze," said Lottie. "If we were obstinate we should have to assume our pleasantest expressions, and then you could eventually take us home as bits of sculpture. In fact, I'm getting cold already."

"Are you also, Miss Carrie?"

"Oh, I'll thaw out before summer. Don't mind me."

"Well, then, mind me," resumed Lottie. "See how white and smooth the river looks. Why can't we drive home on the ice? It will save miles—I mean it looks so inviting."

"Oh, dear!" cried Carrie, "I feel like protesting now. The longest way round may be both the shortest and safest way home."

"You ladies shall decide. This morning I drove over the route we would take to-night, and I should not fear to take a ton of coal over it."

"A comparison suggesting warmth and a grate fire. I vote for the river," said Lottie promptly.

"Oh, well, Mr. Marstern, if you've been over the ice so recently—I only wish to feel reasonably safe."

"I declare!" thought Marstern, "Lottie is the braver and more brilliant girl; and the fact that she is not inclined to forego the comfort of the home fire for the pleasure of my company, reveals the dif-

ficulty of, and therefore incentive to, the suit I may decide to enter upon before New Year's."

Meanwhile, his heart on Carrie's side began to grow warm and alert, as if recognizing an affinity to some object not far off. Granting that she had not been so brilliant as Lottie, she had been eminently companionable in a more quiet way. If there had not been such bursts of enthusiasm at the beginning of the drive, her enjoyment appeared to have more staying powers. He liked her none the less that her eyes were often turned toward the stars or the dark silhouettes of the leafless trees against the snow. She did not keep saying, "Ah, how lovely! What a fine bit that is!" but he had only to follow her eyes to see something worth looking at.

"A proof that Miss Carrie also is not so preoccupied with the pleasure of my company that she has no thoughts for other things," cogitated Marstern. "It's rather in her favor that she prefers nature to a grate fire. They're about even yet."

Meanwhile the horse was speeding along on the white, hard expanse of the river, skirting the west shore. They now had only about a mile to drive before striking land again; and the scene was so beautiful with the great dim outlines of the mountains before them that both the girls suggested that they should go leisurely for a time.

"We shouldn't hastily and carelessly pass such a picture as that, any more than one would if a fine copy of it were hung in a gallery," said Carrie. "The stars are so brilliant along the brow of that highland yonder that they form a dia—— Oh, oh, what *is* the matter?" and she clung to Marstern's arm.

The horse was breaking through the ice.

"Whoa!" said Marstern firmly. Even as he spoke, Lottie was out of the sleigh and running back on the ice, crying and wringing her hands.

"We shall be drowned!" she almost screamed hysterically. "Mr. Marstern, what *shall* we do? Can't we

turn around and go back the way we came?"

"Miss Carrie, will you do what I ask? Will you believe me when I say that I do not think you are in any danger?"

"Yes, I'll do my best," she replied, catching her breath. She grew calm rapidly as he tried to reassure Lottie, telling her that water from the rising of the tide had overflowed the main ice and that thin ice had formed over it, also that the river at the most was only two or three feet deep at that point. But all was of no avail; Lottie stood out upon the ice in a panic, declaring that he never should have brought them into such danger, and that he must turn around at once and go back as they came.

"But, Miss Waldo, the tide is rising, and we may find wet places returning. Besides, it would bring us home very late. Now, Miss Carrie and I will drive slowly across this place and then return for you. After we have been across it twice you surely won't fear."

"I won't be left alone; suppose you

two should break through and disappear, what would become of *me?*"

"You would be better off than we," he replied, laughing.

"I think it's horrid of you to laugh. Oh, I'm so cold and frightened! I feel as if the ice were giving way under my feet."

"Why, Miss Lottie, we just drove over that spot where you stand. Here, Miss Carrie shall stay with you while I drive back and forth alone."

"Then if you were drowned we'd both be left alone to freeze to death."

"I pledge you my word you shall be by that grate fire within less than an hour if you will trust me five minutes."

"Oh, well, if you will risk your life and ours too; but Carrie must stay with me."

"Will *you* trust me, Miss Carrie, and help me out of this scrape?"

Carrie was recovering from her panic, and replied, "I have given you my promise."

He was out of the sleigh instantly, and the thin ice broke with him also. "I

must carry you a short distance," he said "I cannot allow you to get your feet wet. Put one arm around my neck, so; now please obey as you promised."

She did so without a word, and he bore her beyond the water, inwardly exulting and blessing that thin ice. His decision was coming with the passing seconds; indeed it had come. Returning to the sleigh he drove slowly forward, his horse making a terrible crunching and splashing, Lottie meanwhile keeping up a staccato accompaniment of little shrieks.

"Ah, my charming creature," he thought, "with you it was only, 'What will become of *me?*' I might not have found out until it was too late the relative importance of 'me' in the universe had we not struck this bad crossing; and one comes to plenty of bad places to cross in a lifetime."

The area of thin ice was not very narrow, and he was becoming but a dim and shadowy outline to the girls. Lottie was now screaming for his return. Having crossed the overflowed space and abso-

lutely assured himself that there was no danger, he returned more rapidly and found Carrie trying to calm her companion.

"Oh," sobbed Lottie, "my feet are wet and almost frozen. The ice underneath may have borne you, but it won't bear all three of us. Oh, dear, I wish I hadn't—I wish I was home; and I feel as if I'd never get there."

"Miss Lottie, I assure you that the ice will hold a ton, but I'll tell you what I'll do. I shall put you in the sleigh, and Miss Carrie will drive you over. You two together do not weigh much more than I do. I'll walk just behind you with my hands on the back of the sleigh, and if I see the slightest danger I'll lift you out of the sleigh first and carry you to safety."

This proposition promised so well that she hesitated, and he lifted her in instantly before she could change her mind, then helped Carrie in with a quiet pressure of the hand, as much as to say, "I shall depend on you."

"But, Mr. Marstern, you'll get your feet wet," protested Carrie.

"That doesn't matter," he replied good-naturedly. "I shall be no worse off than Miss Lottie, and I'm determined to convince her of safety. Now go straight ahead as I direct."

Once the horse stumbled, and Lottie thought he was going down head first. "Oh, lift me out, quick, quick!" she cried.

"Yes, indeed I will, Miss Lottie, as soon as we are opposite that grate fire of yours."

They were soon safely over, and within a half hour reached Lottie's home. It was evident she was a little ashamed of her behavior, and she made some effort to retrieve herself. But she was cold and miserable, vexed with herself, and still more vexed with Marstern. That a latent sense of justice forbade the latter feeling only irritated her the more. Individuals as well as communities must have scapegoats; and it is not an unusual impulse on the part of some to blame

and dislike those before whom they have humiliated themselves.

She gave her companions a rather formal invitation to come in and get warm before proceeding farther; but Marstern said very politely that he thought it was too late, unless Miss Carrie was cold. Carrie protested that she was not so cold but that she could easily wait till she reached her own fireside.

"Well, good-night, then!" And the door was shut a trifle emphatically.

"Mr. Marstern," said Carrie sympathetically, "your feet must be very cold and wet after splashing through all that ice water."

"They are," he replied; "but I don't mind it. Well, if I had tried for years I could not have found such a test of character as we had to-night."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, well, you two girls did not behave exactly alike. I liked the way you behaved. You helped me out of a confounded scrape."

"Would you have tried for years to find a test?" she asked, concealing the keenness of her query under a laugh.

"I should have been well rewarded if I had, by such a fine contrast," he replied.

Carrie's faculties had not so congealed but that his words set her thinking. She had entertained at times the impression that she and Lottie were his favorites. Had he taken them out that night together in the hope of contrasts, of finding tests that would help his halting decision? He had ventured where the intuitions of a girl like Carrie Mitchell were almost equal to second sight; and she was alert for what would come next.

He accepted her invitation to come in and warm his feet at the glowing fire in the grate, which Carrie's father had made before retiring. Mrs. Mitchell, feeling that her daughter was with an old friend and playmate, did not think the presence of a chaperon essential, and left the young people alone. Carrie bustled about, brought cake, and made hot

lemonade, while Marstern stretched his feet to the grate with a luxurious sense of comfort and complacency, thinking how homelike it all was, and how paradisical life would become if such a charming little Hebe presided over his home. His lemonade became nectar offered by such hands.

She saw the different expression in his eyes. It was now homage, decided preference for one, and not mere gallantry to two. Outwardly she was demurely oblivious and maintained simply her wonted friendliness. Marstern, however, was thawing in more senses than one, and he was possessed by a strong impulse to begin an open siege at once.

"I haven't had a single suit of any kind yet, Carrie," he said, dropping the prefix of "Miss," which had gradually been adopted as they had grown up.

"Oh, well, that was the position of all the great lawyers once," she replied, laughing. Marstern's father was wealthy, and all knew that he could afford to be briefless for a time.

"I may never be great, but I shall work as hard as any of them," he continued. "To tell you the honest truth, however, this would be the happiest Christmas Eve of my life if I had a downright suit on my hands. Why can't I be frank with you and say I'd like to begin the chief suit of my life now and here,—a suit for this little hand? I'd plead for it as no lawyer ever pleaded before. I settled that much down on the ice."

"And if I hadn't happened to behave on the ice in a manner agreeable to your lordship, you would have pleaded with the other girl?" she remarked, withdrawing her hand and looking him directly in the eyes.

"What makes you think so?" he asked somewhat confusedly.

"You do."

He sprang up and paced the room a few moments, then confronted her with the words, "You shall have the whole truth. Any woman that I would ask to be my wife is entitled to that," and he

told her just what the attitude of his mind had been from the first.

She laughed outright, then gave him her hand as she said, "Your honesty insures that we can be very good friends; but I don't wish to hear anything more about suits which are close of kin to law-suits."

He looked very dejected, feeling that he had blundered fatally in his precipitation.

"Come now, Hedley, be sensible," she resumed, half laughing, half serious. "As you say, we can be frank with each other. Why, only the other day we were boy and girl together coasting down hill on the same sled. You are applying your legal jargon to a deep experience, to something sacred—the result, to my mind, of a divine instinct. Neither you nor I have ever felt for each other this instinctive preference, this subtle gravitation of the heart. Don't you see? Your head has been concerned about me, and only your head. By a kindred process you would select

one bale of merchandise in preference to another. Good gracious! I've faults enough. You'll meet some other girl that will stand some other test far better than I. I want a little of what you call silly romance in my courtship. See; I can talk about this suit as coolly and fluently as you can. We'd make a nice pair of lovers, about as frigid as the ice-water you waded through so good-naturedly"; and the girl's laugh rang out merrily, awakening echoes in the old house. Mr. and Mrs. Mitchell might rest securely when their daughter could laugh like that. It was the mirth of a genuine American girl whose self-protection was better than the care of a thousand duennas.

He looked at her with honest admiration in his eyes, then rose quietly and said, "That's fine, Carrie. Your head's worth two of mine, and you'd make the better lawyer. You see through a case from top to bottom. You were right—I wasn't in love with you; I don't know whether I'm in love with you now, and

you haven't an infinitesimal spark for me. Nevertheless, I begin my suit here and now, and I shall never withdraw it till you are engaged to another fellow. So there!"

Carrie looked rather blank at this result of her *reductio ad absurdum* process; and he did not help her by adding, "A fellow isn't always in love. There must be a beginning; and when I arrive at this beginning under the guidance of reason, judgment, and observation, I don't see as I'm any more absurd than the fellow who tumbles helplessly in love, he doesn't know why. What becomes of all these people who have divine gravitations? You and I both know of some who had satanic repulsions afterward. They used their eyes and critical faculties after marriage instead of before. The romance exhaled like a morning mist; and the facts came out distinctly. They learned what kind of man and woman they actually were, and two idealized creatures were sent to limbo. Because I don't blunder upon the woman I

wish to marry, but pick her out, that's no reason I can't and won't love her. Your analysis and judgment were correct only up to date. You have now to meet a suit honestly, openly announced. This may be bad policy on my part; yet I have so much faith in you and respect for you that I don't believe you will let my precipitation create a prejudice. Give me a fair hearing; that's all I ask."

"Well, well, I'll promise not to frown, even though some finer paragon should throw me completely in the shade."

"You don't believe in me yet," he resumed, after a moment of thought. "I felt that I had blundered awfully a while ago; but I doubt it. A girl of your perceptions would soon have seen it all. I've not lost anything by being frank from the start. Be just to me, however. It wasn't policy that led me to speak, but this homelike scene, and you appearing like the good genius of a home."

He pulled out his watch, and gave a low whistle as he held it toward her. Then his manner suddenly became grave

and gentle. "Carrie," he said, "I wish you, not a merry Christmas, but a happy one, and many of them. It seems to me it would be a great privilege for a man to make a woman like you happy."

"Is this the beginning of the suit?" she asked, with a laugh that was a little forced.

"I don't know. Perhaps it is; but I spoke just as I felt. Good-night!"

She would not admit of a trace of sentiment on her part. "Good-night!" she said. "Merry Christmas! Go home and hang up your stocking."

"Bless me!" she thought, as she went slowly up the stairs, "I thought I was going to be through with him for good and all, except as a friend; but if he goes on this way——"

The next morning a basket of superb roses was left at her home. There was no card, and mamma queried and surmised; but the girl knew. They were not displeasing to her, and somehow, before the day was over, they found their way to her room; but she shook her

head decidedly as she said, "He must be careful not to send me other gifts, for I will return them instantly. Flowers, in moderation, never commit a girl."

But then came another gift—a book with pencilings here and there, not against sentimental passages, but words that made her think. It was his manner in society, however, that at once annoyed, perplexed, and pleased her. On the first occasion they met in company with others, he made it clear to everyone that he was her suitor; yet he was not a burr which she could not shake off. He rather seconded all her efforts to have a good time with any and every one she chose. Nor did he, wallflower fashion, mope in the meanwhile and look unutterable things. He added to the pleasure of a score of others, and even conciliated Lottie, yet at the same time surrounded the girl of his choice with an atmosphere of unobtrusive devotion. She was congratulated on her conquest —rather maliciously so by Lottie. Her air of courteous indifference was well

maintained; yet she was a woman, and could not help being flattered. Certain generous traits in her nature were touched also by an homage which yielded everything and exacted nothing.

The holidays soon passed, and he returned to his work. She learned incidentally that he toiled faithfully, instead of mooning around. At every coigne of vantage she found him, or some token of his ceaseless effort. She was compelled to think of him, and to think well of him. Though mamma and papa judiciously said little, it was evident that they liked the style of lover into which he was developing.

Once during the summer she said, "I don't think it's right to let you go on in this way any longer."

"Are my attentions so very annoying?"

"No, indeed. A girl never had a more agreeable or useful friend."

"Are you engaged to some other fellow?"

"Of course not. You know better."

"There is no 'of course not' about it

I couldn't and wouldn't lay a straw in the way. You are not bound, but I."

"You bound?"

"Certainly. You remember what I said."

"Then I must accept the first man that asks me——"

"I ask you."

"No; someone else, so as to unloose your conscience and give you a happy deliverance."

"You would leave me still bound and hopeless in that case. I love you now, Carrie Mitchell."

"Oh, dear! you are incorrigible. It's just a lawyer's persistence in winning a suit."

"You can still swear on the dictionary that you don't love me at all?"

"I might—on the dictionary. There. I won't talk about such things any more," and she resolutely changed the subject.

But she couldn't swear, even on the dictionary. She didn't know where she stood or how it would all end; but with increasing frequency the words, "I

love you now," haunting her waking and dreaming hours.

The holidays were near again, and then came a letter from Marstern, asking her to take another sleigh ride with him on Christmas Eve. His concluding words were, "There is no other woman in the world that I want on the other side of me." She kissed these words, then looked around in a startled, shamefaced manner, blushing even in the solitude of her room.

Christmas Eve came, but with it a wild storm of wind and sleet. She was surprised at the depth of her disappointment. Would he even come to call through such a tempest?

He did come, and come early; and she said demurely, "I did not expect you on such a night as this."

He looked at her for a moment, half humorously, half seriously, and her eyes drooped before his. "You will know better what to expect next time," was his comment.

"When is next time?"

"Any and every time which gives me a chance to see you. Who should know that better than you?"

"Are you never going to give up?" she asked with averted face.

"Not till you become engaged."

"Hush! They are all in the parlor."

"Well, they ought to know as much, by this time, also."

She thought it was astonishing how he made himself at home in the family circle. In half an hour there was scarcely any restraint left because a visitor was present. Yet, as if impelled by some mysterious influence, one after another slipped out; and Carrie saw with strange little thrills of dismay that she would soon be alone with that indomitable lawyer. She signaled to her mother, but the old lady's eyes were glued to her knitting.

At last they were alone, and she expected a prompt and powerful appeal from the plaintiff; but Marstern drew his chair to the opposite side of the hearth and chatted so easily, naturally,

and kindly that her trepidation passed utterly. It began to grow late, and a heavier gust than usual shook the house. It appeared to waken him to the dire necessity of breasting the gale, and he rose and said:

"I feel as if I could sit here forever, Carrie. It's just the impression I had a year ago to-night. You, sitting there by the fire, gave then, and give now to this place the irresistible charm of home. I think I had then the decided beginning of the divine gravitation,—wasn't that what you called it?—which has been growing so strong ever since. You thought then that the ice water I had waded through was in my veins. Do you think so now? If you do I shall have to take another year to prove the contrary. Neither am I convinced of the absurdity of my course, as you put it then. I studied you coolly and deliberately before I began to love you, and reason and judgment have had no chance to jeer at my love."

"But, Hedley," she began with a slight

tremor in her tones, "you are idealizing me as certainly as the blindest. I've plenty of faults."

"I haven't denied that; so have I plenty of faults. What right have I to demand a perfection I can't offer? I have known people to marry who imagined each other perfect, and then come to court for a separation on the ground of incompatibility of temperament. They learned the meaning of that long word too late, and were scarcely longer about it than the word itself. Now, I'm satisfied that I could cordially agree with you on some points, and lovingly disagree with you on others. Chief of all, it's your instinct to make a home. You appear better at your own fireside than when in full dress at a reception. You——"

"See here, Hedley, you've got to give up this suit at last. I'm engaged," and she looked away as if she could not meet his eyes.

"Engaged?" he said slowly, looking at her with startled eyes.

"Well, about the same as engaged. My heart has certainly gone from me beyond recall."

He drew a long breath. "I was foolish enough to begin to hope," he faltered.

"You must dismiss hope to-night, then," she said, her face still averted.

He was silent and she slowly turned toward him. He had sunk into a chair and buried his face in his hands, the picture of dejected defeat.

There was a sudden flash of mirth through tear-gemmed eyes, a glance at the clock, then noiseless steps, and she was on her knees beside him, her arm about his neck, her blushing face near his wondering eyes as she breathed:

"Happy Christmas, Hedley! How do you like your first gift; and what room is there now for hope?"